

NEW LIFE THROUGH SHARED MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

In the face of declining attendance and financial instability, many US churches struggle. This project explores shared ministry—where congregations partner under one leader—as a potential solution. Theologically, it is grounded in Paul's Philippians *dubitatio* (1:18-26), where he grapples with the choice between life and death, along with concepts like the priesthood of all believers and the cruciform nature of ministry. It frames shared ministry as "choosing life" for struggling congregations. Research reveals benefits and challenges, including collaboration, resource-sharing, increased workload, and resistance to change. Ultimately, the study suggests shared ministry, with clear vision and trust, can offer renewal and growth.

INTRODUCTION

In the face of mounting challenges—declining attendance, financial instability, pastoral shortages, and an increasingly post-Christian culture—the church in the United States is undergoing profound transformation. For many congregations, particularly within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), traditional models of ministry no longer seem sustainable. One possible alternative approach is that of shared ministry—a collaborative model in which two or more congregations partner under a single pastoral leader or leadership team.

Far too often, this model is perceived as a desperate, last-ditch effort to delay closing. However, this project proposes a different view: that shared ministry can, in fact, be a life-giving choice for partnering congregations and their pastors that is capable of renewing mission, deepening relationships, and sparking spiritual vitality.

Using the lens of Philippians 1:18-26 and interrogating the Lutheran perception of shared ministry, this project explores this question: what are the challenges of shared ministry leadership in two congregations in different stages of life? Grounded in both personal experience and formal research, I will argue that, instead of being a last resort choice that precedes the closing of a congregation, yoking two or more communities of faith together in shared ministry can be life-giving for congregations and pastors alike.

To do this, I will begin in Chapter One by offering the context of this project, grounding its theological and practical exploration in the real-life experiences of two ELCA congregations, both of whom I previously served: Grace & Glory Lutheran Church in suburban Oldham County, Kentucky, and Third Lutheran Church in urban Louisville, Kentucky. Both congregations faced significant transitions—financial

limitations, declining attendance, and facility challenges—but responded with bold vision and collaborative energy. This chapter details the story of how these two distinct communities came together in shared ministry, the hurdles they faced, and the transformation that occurred as they discerned new paths forward. It also reflects on my own vocational background in labor organizing and its influences on relational leadership practices within my own parish ministry.

Then, in Chapter Two I will explore the theological foundations for this project and for understanding shared ministry through the lens of Philippians 1:18-26. This pericope—Paul’s *dubitatio*¹ on choosing to “remain in the flesh” for the sake of the church—provides a framework for understanding shared ministry not as an end, but as an act of faith and boldness. From this primary text, I will develop three key theological themes: the paradox of death and resurrection, the priesthood of all believers, and the cruciform nature of ministry. Each of these supports the argument that shared ministry can be a deeply faithful and participatory expression of the church’s mission when rooted in relationships, mutual service, and trust in God’s life-giving Spirit.

I will follow in Chapter Three by detailing the project in full, including my research methodology and findings, which was conducted in two phases: first, surveying and interviewing rostered leaders in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod of the ELCA to assess perceptions of and experiences with shared ministry; and second, engaging members of Grace & Glory and Third to evaluate how shared ministry has shaped their congregational life. The findings reveal both affirmations and hesitations—ranging from the benefits of collaboration and resource-sharing to the challenges of perceived

¹A *dubitatio* is a complex figure of speech in which a speaker explicitly weighs her or his options in the course of making a difficult decision. Perhaps the most famous *dubitatio* is that of Hamlet in his soliloquy that begins, “To be or not to be—that is the question.” (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.1.64)

increased pastoral workload, cultural differences, and congregational resistance to change. Despite these hurdles, the data overwhelmingly support the conclusion that shared ministry, when entered into with clear vision and relational trust, can be a vibrant, Spirit-led path forward.

Finally, in Chapter Four, after fully exploring the contextual, theological, and research methodology and results of my project, I will close with a full evaluation of it. This will include identifying some of the main themes identified in my data and determining whether my original research question was answered. I will also identify other questions that arose as a result of my project. I will identify new learning and understanding revealed about both my project topic and the ministry context in which it was explored. Lastly, I will outline potential areas for future research that emerged—a list that is vast given that so little has been written on this topic.

As this project will show, shared ministry is not simply a solution to scarcity. When guided by prayerful discernment, theological reflection, and relational leadership, it becomes a courageous expression of resurrection hope—a way for congregations and leaders alike to remain “in the flesh,” continuing to serve for the progress and joy of the faith.

CHAPTER 1 - THE CONTEXT

I grew up in a shared ministry setting. In my native state of South Dakota, characterized by its wide open spaces and rural way of life, multi-point parishes are common and have been for decades. In my own childhood and youth, I was nurtured by a congregation that was part of a four-point parish, served by a solo pastor who drove a round trip of 150 miles every Sunday. He lived seventy-five miles away from my hometown. Understandably, this meant he was rarely “on the ground” in our small congregation. Yet, ours was a vibrant church, led by many adept and active lay leaders and members.

At nineteen, I moved to southern California, which, as one can imagine, was quite a culture shock. Although my full-time work was in other areas, I was always active in Lutheran churches, particularly because of my musical abilities. I was a classically-trained pianist and organist, choir director, and music and worship director. This vocational work began in a Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) church in Orange County. It then led to other positions further north in the Long Beach-Los Angeles area with several congregations in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). In the latter part of my time in the Los Angeles area, I worked at four different ELCA churches in the San Gabriel foothills. Even then, in the early 2000s, the topic of congregations partnering together continued to “bubble up” in synodical conference conversations, although nothing formal ever seemed to develop.

In 2017, after a decades-long career of labor, community, and political organizing in southern California and south Texas, I was ordained as a second-career pastor and called to serve a congregation in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA. This congregation,

Grace & Glory Lutheran Church, is located in Goshen, Kentucky, a suburb northeast of Louisville. The area, which began as a mostly rural area featuring rolling hills and horse farms, developed into a suburb after 1975—the result of “white flight” from Louisville in response to court-ordered bussing, something that has taken time for older, founding members of the congregation to recognize and acknowledge.

Grace & Glory Lutheran Church

Grace & Glory was chartered as an ELCA congregation in 1991, a relatively young congregation by ELCA standards. It began as a mission start, aided by Ascension Lutheran Church, a larger ELCA congregation situated in one of the outer rings of Louisville. Grace & Glory is located in Oldham County, the wealthiest county in the state. It requires means to live in Oldham County. According to the National Association of Realtors’ most recent data, the median housing price is \$410,280, compared to Louisville Metro, Kentucky’s most populous metropolitan area, where the median price is \$265,550.² The result is a fairly homogeneous area where 87.3% of the population are white/non-Hispanic with means,³ a statistic that was even higher when I was first called to the congregation. The community is also a more highly educated area than most other parts of the state. These demographics are reflected in the church’s members and leadership.

Grace & Glory is a very small church. Its average worship attendance has declined over time from a high of approximately seventy-five members to twenty-two at the time of my call. In addition to the reality of post-Christendom Christianity and a

²National Association of Realtors. “Median Home Prices and Mortgage Payments by County.” National Association of Realtors, January 8, 2025. <https://www.nar.realtor/research-and-statistics/housing-statistics/county-median-home-prices-and-monthly-mortgage-payment>, accessed Jan. 28, 2025.

³Data USA. “Jefferson County, KY.” Data USA. Accessed January 27, 2025. <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/jefferson-county-ky>, accessed Jan. 27, 2025.

growing shortage of available pastors, this decline was identified by congregation members as mostly resulting from a series of short-term pastorates of no more than two to four years throughout its relatively short history. When I arrived in 2017, the church had been without a called pastor for nearly two years. Nevertheless, this small congregation, given the affluence of the area and of the congregation itself, could afford to call me, a full-time, second-career solo pastor.

I was initially intrigued by Grace & Glory for many reasons, particularly its vibrant leadership and mission. The congregation's leaders consisted of many highly educated and working professionals, middle to upper middle class, retired and still employed, who reflected the demographics of the surrounding community. Throughout the many pastorates and pastoral vacancies, these leaders had guided the congregation through many changes. The church had never owned a building, although it had purchased a 12-acre parcel in its first year of existence. By the time I arrived, the congregation had relocated four times, moving from one leased space to another. During my tenure as pastor, the church, for legitimate yet challenging reasons, made two more moves and is currently housed in an historic 19th century church. In my own opinion, this lack of identification with a building helped them retain their original sense of mission that was reflected in a deep sense of welcome on the part of the congregation. This practice of hospitality is reflected in the fact that Grace & Glory was one of the earliest *Reconciling in Christ* congregations in the Synod, a designation in our denomination that reflects an intentional witness to and deep welcome extended toward people of diverse identities, particularly members of the LBGTQIA+ community.

Then, there was Grace & Glory's vibrant food ministry. In 2011, six years before I arrived, Grace & Glory opened a food pantry even though it was located in the northern and most affluent part of the county. People scoffed at such a venture. Yet, by the time I left in August 2024, this expanded food ministry served a diverse number of women, children and men, averaging between 800-1,000 each month. Many of these clients, or "members," as we called them, came from within the boundaries of Oldham County. Substantial numbers, however, also came from surrounding counties, both rural and urban. Over the eight years I served this congregation, our ministry to this diverse population became increasingly more incarnational, with volunteers from the congregation and community more deeply embedded in our clients' lived experience on the margins of the community.

In early 2018, I began to recognize that a high percentage of our congregation's annual budget was devoted to my salary and benefits, leaving minimal funding for ministry. It was at that time that I initiated a conversation with leadership about shared ministry. With their blessing, I began to look for another church with whom we might partner. In consultation with the director of evangelical mission at our Synod, we began to search for a congregation that would be a good fit, especially from geographic and cultural perspectives.

The initial list of possibilities from the Synod were not satisfactory matches. One was too far away and the other was too culturally different. We reached out to a neighboring church within the United Methodist Church, a full-communion partner of the ELCA. Grace & Glory had a long history of partnering in ministry with this congregation. However, with the broader denominational challenges the United

Methodist Church (UMC) was experiencing at the time around the issue of ordaining LGBTQIA+ pastors, their pastor and members of the congregation felt it was not the right time to participate in a conversation around shared ministry.⁴

Then, the following year, I was approached by an ELCA colleague who was serving another congregation in our conference, namely Third Lutheran. He confidentially shared that he was exploring an out-of-state call that would result in a pastoral vacancy at this Louisville-based church. He expressed his concern that this congregation could not really afford to call a full-time pastor. Together, we wondered about the possibility of a partnership between the two. However, there was little more to do at that point. The existing polity of our denomination does not allow for any such conversations until after the called pastor has left. So, for the next few months, we held that conversation closely.

Third Lutheran Church

Third Lutheran Church describes itself as a “proudly progressive, boldly inclusive, radically friendly faith community.” It is a small, diverse church—also a *Reconciling in Christ* congregation—originally chartered in 1886, and diverse in terms of gender and sexuality, but not race. Until recently, Third was located in the Clifton neighborhood of Louisville, a gentrified urban area that is considered culturally progressive, possessing historic homes and a unique character that reflects its diverse population. Frankfort Avenue is a main thoroughfare in this area and, at the time, Third

⁴Peter Weber, The Week US, “The Breakup of the United Methodist Church,” The Week, January 5, 2023, <https://theweek.com/religion/1019544/the-widening-schism-in-the-united-methodist-church>, accessed January 23, 2025. The pastor of this neighboring church was unsure what direction her congregation would eventually decide upon when the final denominational decision was reached on this issue, whether they would remain in the UMC or leave with other more conservative churches. Also, because this issue occurred in the midst of the pandemic, the ultimate resolution would be delayed for several years.

Lutheran was located on Frankfort in an original and ornate Gothic Revival church building, built in 1931, along with a nearby parsonage.⁵

In the 1960s and 1970s the congregation was large, worshipping several hundred each Sunday, with a large Sunday school population. In the “great flood” of 1937, Third was a central staging ground for rescue teams organized by its pastor for the entire Louisville community. It was ecumenically connected to many other progressive churches in the area during the Civil Rights era. In 1974, after a devastating tornado in the city, Third partnered with other churches in the neighborhood to form United Crescent Hill Ministries (UCHM), which is still in operation and serves approximately 3,500 people annually through food assistance, youth and senior programs, community development, organizing, and advocacy. Several of the church’s members are still active as volunteers and board members.⁶

Membership at Third began to dwindle, however, and, by 2018, the congregation worshiped an average of thirty people and was facing substantial capital and maintenance costs. In the spring of that year, about six months before I was initially approached by their pastor, the members of Third recognized that they could no longer afford to maintain their aging building and voted unanimously to list and sell their beloved church building and parsonage to become a “church without walls.”

The building sold quickly and the congregation scrambled to find alternative space in which to embed itself, eventually renting from two neighboring congregations: office and storage space in an Episcopalian congregation and worship space in a

⁵“Third Lutheran Church -,” World-Architects, accessed February 10, 2025, <https://www.world-architects.com/en/architecture-news/building-of-the-week/third-lutheran-church>, accessed January 23, 2025.

⁶United Crescent Hill Ministries, “Who We Are – United Crescent Hill Ministries,” United Crescent Hill Ministries, accessed January 28, 2025, <https://www.uchmlouky.org/who-we-are/>, accessed Jan 29, 2025.

progressive Baptist community. Third was connected with both congregations, having partnered with them together in many ways, including at UCHM. Less than thirty days after first voting to sell, the congregation left its building behind and moved into its new spaces, none of which could be easily accessed by those with disabilities or mobility challenges. This, among other factors, resulted in a loss of nearly thirty percent of its worshipping population.

In January 2020, still reeling from the loss of its building, the congregation lost two of its matriarchs. Their funerals were held within days of each other within the same week. The following week, Third's pastor announced that he had accepted a call to a congregation in Alabama. He was a son of the congregation, an active lay leader before attending seminary, a two-year intern there and someone who had held the church together after their former pastor left to take another call. He was eventually called to Third and ordained as the first partnered gay pastor in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod, serving them faithfully for an additional five years.⁷ The congregation was devastated by his announcement to leave. Within thirty days, he and his husband, who was also deeply involved and active in the congregation, moved away, compounding the loss of members. A seminary student—another son of the congregation—was temporarily appointed as a part-term interim.

In mid-March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, turning everyone's world even further upside down. Third's seminary student served them until June, leading

⁷Gibson, Kevin. "Opening Gates: Gay Rights, Same-Sex Marriage and the Church." LEO Weekly, May 13, 2015. <https://www.leoweekly.com/news/opening-gates-gay-rights-same-sex-marriage-and-the-church-15771488>, accessed Jan. 15, 2025.

livestreamed worship and providing pastoral care by telephone. Then, he, too, left to begin his own pastoral internship at a congregation in Cincinnati, OH.

Shared Ministry & New Life

It was in my role as dean of the South Central Conference of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod that I invited the members of Third to join Grace & Glory on Zoom for regular worship after their seminary intern left for his internship. At the same time, our synod's mission director and I initiated conversations at Third and Grace & Glory, respectively, about the possibility of entering into shared ministry together. Over the next four months, through online worship and Zoom calls with the leadership of both churches, we worked to build relationships and to discuss the nature of a partnership.

In September, a shared ministry agreement was tentatively agreed upon and approved by both church councils, then submitted to each congregation in specially-called online meetings led by Synod staff. Both congregations unanimously voted to approve the shared ministry agreement and enter into partnership.

On January 1, 2021, pursuant to the agreement, I was appointed the interim pastor at Third and began to serve both congregations as a full-time pastor. My costs were shared equally between the two churches. Under the agreement, both congregations would remain independent, but would also form a joint council, primarily charged with finding ways to further deepen the connection between the two communities of faith.

The next summer, in July 2021, Grace & Glory would move to a newer, larger space, leased from a neighboring Presbyterian church. This move, which was accomplished with many volunteers from across the community, allowed the church to provide dedicated space for its food pantry and, in the process, change its model to an

accompaniment shopping model. This change allowed for building even deeper relationships between the pantry's mostly white affluent volunteers and its poorer, often more racially diverse, clients.

After just a few months, the members of Third, frustrated with their worship space and its lack of accessibility, voted to temporarily worship with Grace & Glory in their new facility, nearly fifteen miles away. Although challenging for Third's members, this decision was highly instrumental in building the relationships between individual members and, thereby, deepening the ties between the two communities of faith. By late 2021, Third's leadership would decide to discontinue its lease of office and worship space at the Episcopal and Baptist churches and move in on a short-term basis with Grace & Glory.

As both churches were settling into Grace & Glory's new space, I began a months-long visioning process with the leadership of Third that, to begin with, allowed for the time and space to grieve the congregation's many losses. This was followed by several months of wondering together who and what the Spirit might be calling the congregation to be. It also included time to consider whether the congregation should move towards a "holy closure."⁸ There was substantial agreement among Third's leaders and members that the congregation had reinvented itself too many times in its 135-year history to give up. Together, we began to identify the many gifts and assets of its small membership and prayerfully consider many different possibilities. The leadership was determined to do something new and innovative, consistent with Third's long history of

⁸ "Holy closure" is a term developed and used by the Indiana-Kentucky Synod as part of the process of congregational closings. It is a formalized, ritualized process that leads congregational members through a process of reflection and thanksgiving, which is intended to aid in the grieving process of closing their church.

innovation and of being an open and hospitable community of faith to all people, particularly those deeply wounded by the church.

By the end of the following summer, in 2022, the church council had formulated a strategic plan to open a hybrid dinner church and art gallery patterned after similar ministries at St. Lydia's⁹ in Brooklyn, New York, and the Gallery at Morningstar¹⁰ in Matthews, North Carolina, respectively.¹¹ The plan sought \$30,000 for start-up and additional monies to cover three years of operation with funds to come from the trust established after the sale of the church four years earlier. The congregation considered the proposal and unanimously approved it in October.

Shortly thereafter, church leaders began searching for a space in which to house this new and innovative hybrid ministry. By December, Third's leadership had located a storefront space embedded in the Shelby Park neighborhood—a regenerating area near downtown Louisville characterized by historic “shotgun” houses and a growing population of young and diverse singles and families. The owner of the property was a local developer who was committed to revitalizing the area and excited at the possibilities Third would bring to the community. Both parties signed a lease. Within seven months

⁹St. Lydia's, “St. Lydia's Website,” St. Lydia's Website, accessed January 6, 2025, <https://www.stlydias.org/>, accessed January 6, 2025. St. Lydia's is a dinner church in Brooklyn, founded in 2008 as part of the ELCA. Their pastor, Rev. Christian Scharen, graciously gave of his time to assist Third's leadership in outlining different aspects of developing a dinner church model, also providing a working foundational document that the people of St. Lydia's were preparing to more fully formalize their model. Their guidance was deeply helpful for the leadership at Third.

¹⁰The Gallery at Morning Star, “The Gallery At Morning Star,” The Gallery At Morning Star, accessed January 15, 2025, <https://www.thegalleryatmorningstar.com/>. The ELCA's Office of Innovation helped Third make the connection to the Gallery at Morningstar, a ministry of Morning Star Lutheran Church. As with St. Lydia's, the gallery curator, Amelia Osborne, was an important collaborator with and mentor to Third's leadership in the visioning and development process.

¹¹Representatives from both ministries aided Third's leadership in developing the plan in their respective areas of expertise. Eventually, Morning Star Lutheran Church sponsored a visit by the Gallery curator to Louisville to instruct and guide Third's Art Committee members how to prepare the gallery space and display art. This turned into an important partnership for Gallery @ MOSAIC and is another example of congregations working together in collaborative ministry.

the property had been fully rehabilitated and Third was given the key. The church moved in, opening Dinner Church@MOSAIC in September 2022 and Gallery@MOSAIC in November. At the gallery opening, Rev. Dr. William Gafkjen, bishop of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA, presided at its dedication, during which he blessed the hands of the first artists whose works were chosen for the inaugural gallery exhibit. It was an emotional and deeply spiritual moment for the artists, many of whom spoke about how meaningful the experience was—especially after having distanced themselves from organized religion. The space was packed with other local artists, their friends and families, pastors and other members of sibling ELCA churches in Louisville, and many others from the Shelby Park community to celebrate this new gathering place of beauty, faith and spirituality in the midst of their walk-friendly neighborhood. One artist commented that it felt as though the neighborhood now had a spiritual center with the opening of Third@MOSAIC. It was a joyful and deeply celebratory moment for the congregation, marking the end of what one leader described as years of “wandering in the wilderness.”

Since then, Third has continued to welcome local and diverse artists to share their work and regularly hosts art openings. Interest in Dinner Church is steadily growing. Given the community that Third is focused on serving, the process of healing from the deep hurt and alienation many have experienced from Christianity is understandably slow. Yet, Third has become an emerging center of hope, spirituality, and community—deeply rooted in a vibrant, growing neighborhood in the heart of urban Louisville.

Shortly after Third's gallery opened, Grace & Glory suffered a major setback just two days before Christmas Eve. Less than eighteen months into their four-year lease, the local presbytery, part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), issued the congregation an eviction notice. The presbytery had taken control of the building and grounds from the member church that originally leased the space to Grace & Glory. This church had chosen to close, unable to bridge the denominational divide and unwilling to explore a partnership with Grace & Glory like theirs with Third.¹² It was a devastating and shocking experience for the members of Grace & Glory, for the food pantry and its volunteers and members, and for the entire north Oldham community. After a few months of negotiations, Grace & Glory's leadership reached an agreement with the presbytery to extend the date of eviction. After a time spent grieving this loss, the congregation began to consider what its next steps might be and entered into its own time of discernment just as Third had only months before.

In May 2023, exhausted from the Third's move and the joyful, yet stressful, work of opening Third@MOSAIC, I left to take a desperately-needed sabbatical rest. During my absence, Rev. Nancy Nyland, my colleague and the synod's Director of Evangelical Mission, graciously led Grace & Glory in its discernment process. This included an honest consideration of whether or not it too should engage in "holy closure." After my return twelve weeks later, the congregation was nearing the end of its visioning process. Within the next month, the congregation planned its relocation and voted to begin a new ministry that focused on ministering to and supporting LGBTQIA+ youth and parents, a need identified by the schools and surrounding neighborhoods. The congregation also

¹²It should be noted that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the ELCA are full communion partners and have been since 1997.

voted to transition its food ministry into a separate 501(c)(3) nonprofit, with the long-term goal of handing it over to be led jointly by church members and the broader North Oldham community and to operate independently from Grace & Glory.

In September 2023, the entire community rallied around the congregation to help it move, along with food pantry volunteers, several local Boy Scout troops and a youth group from another neighboring Methodist congregation. Grace & Glory's former landlord welcomed them back with open arms, even constructing a needed temperature-controlled food storage building for the food pantry. By November, the congregation had settled in, was preparing for its first Christmas Eve service in its new/old location, and beginning to wonder about the new year and the new ministry upon which it was preparing to embark.

At first glance, this may seem like a lot of background for two small congregations in the Louisville area. It is fair to ask why their stories are included at all. But understanding their history is essential—it honors both their celebrations and struggles, and acknowledges their years of faithful ministry within their communities. These stories reveal how each congregation has found ways to begin again, demonstrating a deep resilience rooted in their faith in a God of life, not death. In many ways, their journeys mirror those of hundreds of other congregations across our denomination and the broader church.

There is one final contextual aspect to this project that is important to know and understand. This involves me. I never intended to be a pastor. That tiny church that was part of that four-point parish in South Dakota was a church in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). This church body is a theologically conservative denomination

that teaches that only men can be called to be pastors and leaders in the church.

Throughout my upbringing as a young girl, I heard many times that women could not be pastors—that women could not even be leaders in the church. It was a message that I retained internally and that looped over and over in my psyche for decades. At nineteen I moved to southern California from South Dakota. It was only a few short years later in my early twenties after I became an organist in an ELCA congregation in Long Beach, California, that I first witnessed a woman in a leadership role on the church council. Yet, even so, becoming a pastor was a thought that simply never entered my mind.

I moved forward with my life and ultimately secured a role working in the Los Angeles court system. While there, I became involved in my union and was eventually elected president of my local in 1992. In 1997, after six years without a pay raise, I led my coworkers on a strike. Getting to this point took two years of organizing over four hundred colleagues at fifteen sites scattered across Los Angeles County. Yet, our successful walkout involved 92% of my coworkers—a strong and effective showing. Within ten days, we reached a settlement and were back at work.

This was the start of a new vocation for me, one that I had never anticipated or expected. Soon I was offered a full-time position as an organizing director with the regional council of our national union that primarily represented public sector employees. I accepted the offer and spent the next fifteen years working in a series of positions in the labor movement representing thousands of workers in many different industries.

My work was varied—I worked as an organizer, as an organizing director, as a union representative, as a labor negotiator, and as a statewide director. I engaged in political lobbying and community organizing in support of various organizing and

contract campaigns. I was trained and mentored in the tradition of Marshall Ganz, a long-time organizer for the United Farm Workers, who is credited with developing a widely-used grassroots organizing model in the 1980s that is still used today for community, political, and labor organizing.

Through my own discernment, I eventually realized a latent call to ministry. Embracing this, I enrolled in seminary to become a full-time worship and music director, a path that later prompted further discernment and an eventual call to pastoral ministry. This call to pastoral ministry, along with the ELCA ordination requirement, led me to spend a year at Luther Seminary. To my surprise, during a missional leadership course taught by Dr. Dwight Zscheile, I discovered that the same grassroots organizing model I had used for over fifteen years was now being applied in the church. As Dr. Zscheile explained, the model is being adopted because it is deeply relational—designed to foster strong connections between individuals and organizations with the goal of building a broader movement for justice. It’s an ideal approach for the church, and especially for shared ministry, which at its core is about relationships: our relationship with God and our relationships with one another.

As I am beginning to understand and believe, this kind of ministry requires a fundamental shift away from the hierarchical structures that have long defined the church—moving instead toward more grassroots, participatory practices. Dwight Zscheile describes this as a move from *performative* to *participatory* spirituality.¹³ At its core, this shift invites us to truly live into our belief in the priesthood of *all* believers—a principle we affirm in theory but often neglect in practice. Too often, pastors take on more and

¹³Dr. Dwight Zscheile, “Will the ELCA Be Gone in 30 Years? : Faith+Lead,” Faith+Lead, September 5, 2019, <https://faithlead.org/blog/decline/>.

more responsibility for ministry and mission, rather than empowering congregations to fully participate. This change also calls for pastors to set and maintain healthy boundaries—something many of us, who care deeply for our people and the broader church, often find challenging. And ultimately, it requires us to trust the very gospel we proclaim, about Christ crucified and raised from the dead, which bears witness to the life-giving mission of God in our world.

CHAPTER 2 - THE THEOLOGY

The church in the United States is struggling today. More specifically, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is struggling today with declining membership. A 2016 study authorized by the ELCA Office of the Presiding Bishop found that in the nine-year period between 2005 and 2014, the number of ELCA congregations decreased by eleven percent.¹⁴ Although nearly sixty percent of this decline resulted from congregations leaving the ELCA due to the 2009 decision to ordain openly gay and lesbian pastors, by the end of 2023, the ELCA had lost another nine percent of its congregations.¹⁵ The ELCA is no different in this regard than other Christian denominations in the United States. An analysis by the 2023 Pew Research Center found that within just a few decades, Christians will make up less than half of the U. S. population. If current trends continue, by 2070, Christians will make up only a third of the population.¹⁶ This seems existential, a life-and-death struggle for Christianity and for the church.

Paul's *Dubitatio*

At the time he wrote his letter to the church in Philippi, Paul was also engaged in a similar existential struggle. In the opening words of this letter best known for its

¹⁴DeHoek, Adam, and Kenneth Inskeep. "The Supply of and Demand for Clergy in the ELCA." In *ELCA Faith Formation Summit 2016*, 1–19. Chicago, IL: Research and Evaluation, Office of the Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2016.
<https://faithformationsummit.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2016-march-the-supply-of-and-demand-for-clergy-in-the-elca-3-28-16-1.pdf>.

¹⁵ELCA. "Summary of Congregational Statistics as of 12-31-2015." ELCA Resources, June 13, 2017.
<https://resources.elca.org/congregations-and-synod-data/summary-of-congregational-statistics-as-of-12-31-2015/> and "Summary of Congregational Statistics as of 12-31-2023." ELCA Resources, September 13, 2024.
<https://resources.elca.org/congregations-and-synod-data/summary-of-congregational-statistics-as-of-12-31-2023/>.

¹⁶O'Reilly, David. "What Is the Future of Religion in America?" *The Pew Charitable Trusts*, February 7, 2023.
<https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/trust/archive/winter-2023/what-is-the-future-of-religion-in-america>.

deeply-rooted sense of joy, an imprisoned Paul argues whether he should live or die, even leaning toward self-inflicted death when he writes that his “desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better....”¹⁷ Yet, ultimately, Paul decides to choose life—to remain “in the flesh,” a determination he believes is more necessary and useful for the Philippian congregation.¹⁸

From Paul’s *dubitatio* in Philippians 1:18-26, there are several different themes that emerge that will serve as a theological rationale for my project and that I will explore here. The first is that of death and resurrection and wondering how declining congregations that enter into ministry together might begin to view shared ministry as a *life-giving* choice, rather than an end-of-life decision. A second theme explores the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and its connection to the Lutheran understanding of vocation, examining how shared ministry can foster both. The final theme draws a connection between Paul’s struggle and Luther’s *theology of the cross*. It then explores how all believers are transformed to serve others in cruciform ministry and, in particular, how this is lived out in shared ministry.

Death and Resurrection

For many declining churches, the decision to move into shared ministry is a choice often perceived as a last step before death—a way to preserve resources as long as possible before being forced to close. Perception does often become reality. But must it be this way? Is it possible that new life can arise out of this anticipated death? Paul’s reflections from prison in Philippians echo this very tension, facing the threat of death, yet witnessing the gospel flourish in unexpected ways. Much like Ezekiel’s vision in the

¹⁷ Philippians 1:23 (New Revised Standard Version: Updated Edition. Friendship Press, 2021).

¹⁸ Phil. 1:22.

Valley of the Dry Bones where God breathes life into what seems hopelessly lost, Paul's struggle suggests that, even in the most constrained and uncertain circumstances, God's transformative power is still working to bring new life.¹⁹ I will explore this tension and struggle, using both the Philippians text and the related vision in Ezekiel to show that new life is indeed possible through shared ministry.

It is in the opening chapter of Philippians that Paul addresses the concerns that his imprisonment raises for the church in Philippi and for himself. He notes that, notwithstanding those who have used it as an opportunity to advance themselves, the gospel has continued to spread. Paul is realistic towards the future he may be facing. Yet, regardless of its outcome, he continues to be ready to proclaim the gospel "with all boldness" so that "Christ will be exalted."²⁰

Congregations today are similar to the congregation to which Paul writes, struggling to be faithful in the midst of difficulty and challenge. Although this does not necessarily include the imprisonment of their pastoral leaders or other challenges that the congregation in Philippi experienced, many of today's churches are experiencing the challenges of declining population, and its related impact on membership and loss of revenue. They are also experiencing the challenges of buildings that are too large and have become like albatrosses hanging around the necks of congregations. There is a growing shortage of pastors that is predicted to become more dire in the coming years.²¹ Finally, as with the church in Philippi, today's congregations find themselves in a complex and diverse religious, social, and political environment where, just as in Paul's

¹⁹ Ezek. 37:1-14

²⁰ Phil. 1:20.

²¹ Karris Golden, "The Future Is Here," *Living Lutheran*, September 23, 2016, <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2016/09/the-future-is-here/>.

day, the same questions arise post-Christendom: who is really Lord of the world and who deserves our ultimate allegiance.

The Philippians church, like many of our churches today, was worried about what the future might bring. Yet, in the verses that precede Paul's *dubitatio*, he notes that through his own imprisonment, the gospel has progressed, that the entire imperial guard knows that Paul is imprisoned "for Christ."²² The result of this is that Paul's own siblings in Christ have paradoxically become emboldened, becoming more confident by his imprisonment. They have begun to "dare to speak the word" much more boldly and fearlessly.²³

I have witnessed this paradoxical boldness arising out of struggle in my own vocational work as an organizer. There have been many times in that work when it felt as though there was no hope, that the balance of power in a workplace would never change. Yet, it is through struggle that fearlessness and boldness are forged, when workers who have been beaten down decide to stand up against a vicious or recalcitrant employer. This often results in a significant shift in a workplace, empowering others to stand up, changing the entire dynamic, and leading to unexpected improvements for everyone in the workplace. It is through the tension of struggle and hardship that leaders are born, that change happens, and that a new future becomes evident.

Similarly, both congregations I served in shared ministry had been tested. Each of these churches experienced many challenges in their histories. It was through these struggles that they became more bold, insisting that their time as living members of the

²²Phil. 1:13.

²³Phil. 1:14.

body of Christ was not over. In faith, they moved forward, believing that a new, yet unseen, future was available.

Paul's letter holds together this similar tension and paradox of belief and practice, of "talking the talk and walking the walk," encouraging the Philippians—and us—to live in a "manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."²⁴ He challenges them to strive "side by side with one mind" and to not be afraid of opposition, arguing that this is evidence of their salvation and is God's doing.²⁵ In the same way, Paul is challenging us as to whether or not we really believe in the death *and* resurrection of Jesus Christ and whether Jesus will keep his promise to sustain the body of Christ."

In his commentary on Philippians, Daniel Migliore suggests that "Paul's description of witness to the gospel as calling for boldness and fearlessness is also an implicit summons to his siblings in Philippi to be bold and to stand firm in the face of whatever pressures they may be experiencing." He argues that "'boldness' in the midst of danger is a characteristic of the biblical witness" and is what marks true Christian discipleship, although we do not often include it on our lists of Christian virtues.²⁶ This is the same kind of boldness shown by Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms when he could only famously proclaim, "Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me! Amen."²⁷ Paul—like Luther—believed that things would turn out for his deliverance.²⁸ He believed this for two reasons as noted in his opening remarks in Philippians: because of the prayers of the community at Philippi and, more importantly, because of the help of the

²⁴ Phil. 1:27.

²⁵ Phil. 1:27-28.

²⁶ Daniel L. Migliore, *Philippians and Philemon: Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 53.

²⁷ James M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 2003), 161.

²⁸ Phil. 1:19.

Spirit of Jesus Christ.²⁹ This reveals that Christian boldness is not a solitary virtue born of individual courage, but one that arises from a profound trust in the sustaining power of God and the intercessory strength of Christian community. It is a boldness that is both empowered and shared—rooted in divine assistance and nurtured through the prayers and presence of fellow believers.

A decision to close a church can be a faithful decision. Yet, how much more faithful is a decision to believe in a resurrected life—together? Moving into shared ministry is a leap of faith, requiring a deep trust in a God who will not let us be ashamed,³⁰ a God who, over and over again, we see bringing life out of death.³¹ This is, after all, our fundamental Christian belief, seen throughout the entire narrative arc of scripture and as witnessed through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is about—as Paul suggests—remaining “in the flesh,”³² “sticking it out,” or “hanging around,” to quote a few contemporary colloquialisms.

Ezekiel was witness to such communal life becoming “enfleshed.” In Ezekiel, chapter 37, we hear the story of a vision given to him by God. Like Paul, Ezekiel knew suffering, having been taken into exile in Babylon, and witnessing the destruction of his homeland and the death of his people. Yet, even in the midst of this death and destruction, Ezekiel—as with Paul—found hope for his future and for that of his people in the redemptive and resurrectional nature of God.

In this classic story of scripture, Ezekiel is led by God into a valley filled with bones—with very *dry* bones, which suggests that they have been dead for a very long time.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Phil. 1:20.

³¹ Phil. 1:21.

³² Phil. 1:24.

God asks him whether these bones can live, then commands Ezekiel to prophesy to them, to tell them to listen to God's word of promise. It is a word that promises new life, a life that will be manifested in two steps: first, that God will physically restore these dry bones and, then, that God will breathe into them the breath (רוּחַ) of God's Spirit.³³ Ezekiel speaks. And, in his vision, all that God tells him comes true. It is a vision of the regathering of Israel, their spiritual conversion and restoration of the people in the land of promise. It is a vision of the returned remnant, resurrected through the power of God alone.

Is it possible that many of our churches are similarly "dried out?" We are in a post-Christian time. It is a time of social and political upheaval, and anti-institutionalism that is impacting the structures in society, including the church. It may seem that God is dismantling the church before our very eyes. Might it be, though, that rather than dismantling it, God is simply undoing the hierarchies and systems we humans have created—structures that we have put into place to control others or to hold onto power, that have diminished what God desires for the church, and that no longer reflect the fullness of God in the body of Christ as Jesus intended?

In his book, *The Pastor In a Secular Age*, practical theologian Andrew Root tells the dramatic story of attorney Skip Masback in the fourteenth chapter, "When Dry Bones Live Again."³⁴ Despite being a successful lawyer at the peak of his profession, Masback is experiencing deep existential despair. It is a despair that manifests itself in uncontrollable daily crying, which he cannot understand or stop.

³³ Ezek. 37:5-6.

³⁴ Andrew Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age: Ministry to People Who No Longer Need a God* (Baker Academic, 2019), 179-180.

One day, as he is riding a commuter train, Masback is handed a copy of the New Testament by a stranger. As he reads the words, “Fear not,” from the story of Jesus’ birth, he experiences an immediate cessation of his tears. These words, so simple yet so profound, give him a sense of peace that no amount of exercise, meditation, or self-help can achieve. In the next few days, as his despair continues to grow, he repeatedly returns to these simple words, finding solace.

This powerful moment of encountering God’s peace resonates with Paul’s words in Philippians: “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”³⁵ In both Masback’s experience—and Paul’s teaching—we see God’s active presence, offering comfort and a peace that defies human comprehension in the midst of distress. Then, something even more extraordinary happens. One day, as Masback is reading the angel’s words again, he lifts up his eyes and sees a vision of Jesus sitting across from him on the train. This vision, which Masback describes in vivid detail, presents Jesus as a tangible presence, dressed in a robe and sandals. He speaks directly to Masback, saying, “Skip, do not be anxious—I’ll take care of everything.” It is a moment that changes his entire trajectory—not simply a personal spiritual awakening, but a call to ministry. Root interprets this encounter as an invitation from God, that Masback is not only being healed by God, but is being invited to participate in God’s being by ministering to others.

There is a parallel here, Root argues, with Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of the dry bones. In exile, Israel appears to be dead, reduced to nothing but bones, severed from the

³⁵Phil. 4:6-7.

life-giving presence of God. In God's question to Ezekiel—"Mortal, can these bones live?"—there is a presupposition. It is that resurrection is a radical possibility. This is a question that challenges Ezekiel's faith in divine restoration. And ours, too. In other words, Root writes, God is asking, "Can death be reversed? Can these dry, dead bones be resurrected, so they might again receive the ministry of God?"³⁶ God's answer for Ezekiel and Masback—and for the church today—is the empty tomb. Root argues that "God so deeply identifies with death so that God can decisively act within it, reversing its pull and bringing us back from its clutches. Rescued from death...we are freed from sin, reconciled to God's being by being ministers in the world..."³⁷

For many declining congregations, entering shared ministry can feel like a last gasp, a way to stretch dwindling resources before inevitable closure. Yet, scripture reminds us that death is not always the end. In Philippians, Paul writes from prison, uncertain of his future, but witnessing the gospel's growth even in the shadow of death. Likewise, Ezekiel is led into a valley of dry bones and asked by God, "Can these bones live?" Both visions reflect a divine pattern: God brings life out of despair, hope out of struggle, resurrection out of death.

This paradox of boldness forged in hardship is echoed in today's church. Declining numbers, aging buildings, and a shortage of pastors mirror the anxiety of the Philippian church. But, Paul's letter encourages faithfulness, fearlessness, and unity in adversity. Just as organizing work and shared ministry have birthed unexpected vitality from struggle, congregations today can choose boldness over fear. Shared ministry is not merely survival, but it is to choose life. It is a faithful act of resurrection, a living witness

³⁶ Root, 182.

³⁷ Ibid, 184.

that we still believe in a God who breathes life into dry bones, who sustains the body of Christ, and who calls us to walk together boldly into an unseen, but Spirit-filled, future that can lead to spiritual restoration. It can be a fresh breath of life that comes through identifying and utilizing the vast array of gifts given by God to God's people that become available through a less hierarchical system that truly recognizes and lives into the very Lutheran idea of the priesthood of all believers. It is this idea—that we are *all* priests—to which we move next.

Priesthood of All Believers

The Reformation-era doctrine of the priesthood of all believers remains one of Martin Luther's most radical and still under-realized contributions to Christian theology. At its core, it insists that all baptized Christians are priests called to mutual service, spiritual authority, and vocation, not just an elite clergy. At a time when the church faces many challenges, reclaiming this doctrine offers an opportunity to reshape leadership, empower the laity, and dismantle entrenched hierarchies in favor of a cruciform, liberating model of ministry. In this section, I will argue that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is a call to radical accessibility, communal responsibility, and incarnational presence that reflects the love and justice of God in diverse, embodied community.

By 1520, Martin Luther had become desperate. He had seen the deep need for reform in a church he viewed as spiritually corrupt and structurally immovable. For more than two years, beginning with the *95 Theses*, Luther sought this reform from within the church. He concluded that “nothing could be expected from Rome but intransigent

opposition to reform of any sort.”³⁸ Turning to secular rulers, he sought their help, inviting them to intervene in ways that would begin to open the door to ecclesiastical reform. His invitation, initially intended to be a “broadside . . . against the tyranny and baseness of the Roman Curia,” became a manuscript described by Luther as “a few points on the matter of the improvement of the state of Christendom, to be laid before the Christian nobility of the German nation, in the hope that God may help his church through the laity, since the clergy, to whom this task more properly belongs, have grown quite irresponsible.”³⁹ (Luther was never one to mince words.) In answering the question of how the laity might accomplish this, Luther introduced what would become a defining theological development—the doctrine of the *priesthood of all believers*. This was not only a protest against clerical excess, but a bold reimagining of who holds spiritual authority. In arguing that all baptized Christians are priests, Luther laid the groundwork for a vision of radical accessibility to God and to the shared work of ministry, a vision still waiting to be fully realized in communities of faith today.

In the first argument of his treatise, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Improvement of the Christian Estate*, Luther begins to redefine the relationship between clergy and laity, arguing that all Christians are consecrated priests through baptism. He draws from 1st Peter: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you might proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”⁴⁰ This echoes the same covenantal language spoken at Mount Sinai, “...You shall be for me a priestly kingdom

³⁸ J. M. Estes, “To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Improvement of the Christian Estate,” in *The Annotated Luther, Volume 1: The Roots of Reform*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand, Kirsi I. Stjerna, and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 369–433.

³⁹ Estes, 370.

⁴⁰ 1 Peter 2:9.

and a holy nation.”⁴¹ For Luther, this wasn’t simply metaphorical language. It was a theological claim with ecclesial consequences. If all are priests, then the church must be structured as a community of mutual participation, shared responsibility, and co-laboring in the gospel. It directly reflects the communal responsibility that is at the heart of this doctrine, inviting us to consider how ministry is not something done by the few for the many, but, instead, that it is something practiced together that is rooted in our shared baptismal calling—Christ’s priestly work of interceding for and ministering to our neighbor.

From this doctrine, Luther developed his theology of vocation—not simply as occupation, but as one’s lived calling in the everyday circumstances of life. As Gustaf Wingren and later theologians have emphasized, Luther saw vocation as the battleground between the forces of sin and grace, self-centeredness and self-giving love.⁴² There is an insistence that, in Christ, we are freed from all spiritual bondage, or as ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton writes, we are freed from being “trapped in ourselves, consumed by ourselves and from the terror that we can even and must save ourselves.” We are freed from this bondage so that we might love and serve others.

Freedom is a *relationship*, not a new set of activities or the demand of a new law [emphasis added]...In Christ the faithful are new creatures who are opened into newly reconciled and liberated relationships with God, with other creatures and even with oneself...Only when we are captive to God’s will, will we find redemption.⁴³

In this sense, Andrew Root’s description of believers as “ministers in the world” powerfully captures the essence of Luther’s understanding of vocation and the priesthood

⁴¹ Exodus 19:6.

⁴² Marc Kolden, “Luther on Vocation,” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, October 18, 2001, <https://learn.elca.org/jle/luther-on-vocation/>.

⁴³ Elizabeth Eaton, “Set Free,” ed. John Potter, *Living Lutheran*, October 2, 2020, <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2020/10/set-free/>.

of all believers. It highlights that ministry is not confined to ordained clergy or church walls, but is the calling of every baptized person to participate in God’s work of reconciliation in their daily lives.⁴⁴

In its most simple terms, Reformation scholar Timothy Wengert defines it by posing this question, “What am I going to do now that I don’t have to do anything?” The answer? “Serve God and neighbor in beautiful freedom.”⁴⁵ Thus, Christian vocation doesn’t happen in theory but, as Paul might suggest, is living “in the flesh”—through bodies, relationships, and responsibilities.⁴⁶ It is through vocation that the incarnational presence of Christ continues in the world, embodied in and through people who serve their neighbors in love. In this way, the priesthood of all believers is not about elevating the laity to power, but about grounding all of us—clergy and lay alike—in the free-flowing, earthy, messy, grace-filled work of loving God and loving neighbor in real life.

This vision of vocation as freedom to serve others that is rooted in God’s grace and lived out in the complexity of real-world relationships naturally extends to the way Luther understood access to God and theological truth. If all Christians are called to live out their faith in service, they must also be equipped to understand and practice that faith. This is where Luther’s commitment to accessibility becomes central.

At the heart of Luther’s reforms was a radical commitment to access—access to God, to scripture, and to theological understanding. Homiletics professor Shauna Hannan observes that much of Luther’s reforming work was “motivated by a desire for access,” especially unmediated access to God.⁴⁷ This access was not arbitrary or individualistic,

⁴⁴ Root, 184.

⁴⁵ Eaton.

⁴⁶ Phil. 1:22.

⁴⁷ Shauna K Hannan, “That All Might Proclaim: Continuing Luther’s Legacy of Access,” *Dialog* 56, no. 2 (2017): 169–75, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dial.12320>, 169.

but rooted in the evangelical freedom that comes from reconciliation with God. It was this deep conviction that led Luther to translate the Bible into the vernacular, ensuring that all Christians, not just clergy or scholars, could read and interpret scripture for themselves. This democratization of theological understanding reflected his conviction in the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers—Luther’s very bold claim that all Christians are “priests in equal degree.”⁴⁸

To equip believers for this priestly vocation, Luther produced the *Small Catechism*, a tool to educate and form the laity, followed by the *Large Catechism*, primarily intended for clergy, but also accessible to laypeople seeking a deeper theological foundation. In this way, education became a pathway, not to clerical privilege, but to communal empowerment and to practice this vocation. Yet, as Hannan rightly reminds us, “[r]eformation in the Lutheran church in the next century will require more than education; it will require practice. We need a place for people to practice what they discover.”⁴⁹

This call to practice—the lived embodiment of the priesthood of all believers—has become increasingly significant in my own theological development during this doctoral program, particularly through my ministry with the two congregations studied in this project. In one community, I witnessed the priesthood of all believers come alive in profound ways. This congregation, deeply diverse in terms of gender and sexuality, cultivated a worshiping community where older heterosexual members gathered alongside queer, trans, bisexual, and nonbinary individuals—each person recognized as a full participant in the life of the church. As the congregation discerned its future, it

⁴⁸ Ibid, 170.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 171.

centered its mission around building *beloved community*, not as a slogan, but as an incarnational commitment to mutual care and shared calling. This is what the doctrine demands of us: to embody a theology that refuses exclusion, honors difference, and reflects the love and justice of God in diverse, embodied community.

To embrace the priesthood of all believers fully, we must learn to see with new eyes that dislocate power and identity from institutional norms and that reflect the gaze of God. When we look through this lens, we do not see gendered or racialized hierarchies. We see sacred stories, divine image-bearers, and the possibility of liberation. As theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid provocatively writes, God’s love “touches us indecently.”⁵⁰ It unsettles, disrupts, and reorients us. It embraces all bodies, all stories, all lives, especially those that the church has too often marginalized or ignored.

What this looks like in practice will vary across contexts, but to live fully into the priesthood of *all* believers, the church must learn to honor complexity and difference.⁵¹ We must value the flourishing of lives that do not fit neatly into established norms. We must cultivate spaces where freedom, not conformity, defines our communal life. This is an invitation to be fully present and embodied together. It is an invitation to recognize, in the words of another theologian, that “God is in and with unruly bodies.”⁵² In such spaces, the priesthood of all believers becomes not merely a doctrine, but a lived, liberative witness to the gospel.

Ultimately, the priesthood of all believers is not only a doctrine to be taught but a reality to be nurtured. The primary calling of pastoral leadership, then, is to equip the

⁵⁰ Hannah Hofheinz, “Voyeur Bodies, Liberating Identities,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 64, no. 2–3 (2013): 68.

⁵¹ Linn Marie Tonstad, *Queer Theology: Beyond Apologetics* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018): 84.

⁵² *Ibid*, 86.

body of Christ to live out radical accessibility, communal responsibility, and incarnational presence. This involves creating spaces where every person's story is honored, every gift is needed, and every life is held as sacred. True spiritual authority does not come from hierarchy or ordination alone, but from the Spirit's call upon the baptized to serve, love, and lead. To lead in this way is to embrace a servant-shaped, cruciform ministry—one that is grounded in Luther's *theology of the cross*, where strength is found in vulnerability, and leadership is expressed through humility, solidarity, and love.⁵³

Luther's Theology of the Cross and the Cruciform Nature of Ministry

At the heart of Christian ministry is a call to cruciformity—a pattern of life and leadership shaped by the cross, that is not grounded in power or triumphalism, but in weakness, suffering, and radical dependence on God. This vision of ministry is rooted in Martin Luther's theology of the cross, first fully articulated in his 1518 *Heidelberg Disputation*. As Robert Kolb argues, this moment marked “a paradigm shift within Western Christian thought,” challenging traditional views of God, evil, and the human condition.⁵⁴ Luther rejected the prevailing *theologia gloriae*—a theology of glory that portrayed God according to human standards of strength, wisdom, and success. Instead he asserted that God reveals God's self most fully in the suffering and humiliation of the cross. Luther “cut to the quick,” Kolb writes, “and talked about the nature of God and the nature of the human creature trapped in sin.”⁵⁵ For Luther, the cross is not merely a symbol of redemption, but the very place where divine power is paradoxically hidden in suffering. It is only through the crucified Christ that we come to truly know God, not

⁵³ Robert A Muthiah, “Christian Practices, Congregational Leadership, and the Priesthood of All Believers,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 2, no. 2 (2003): 167–203.

⁵⁴ Robert Kolb, “Luther on the Theology of the Cross,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (2002): 443.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

through human reason or moral achievement. This reframes Christian life and leadership: to follow Christ is to take up one's own cross, embracing self-sacrificial love and rejecting self-sufficiency. As Paul writes in 2nd Corinthians, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."⁵⁶ Like Paul, whose imprisonment only deepened his witness, Luther understood that God's power is made manifest not by escaping suffering, but by entering into it on behalf of others.⁵⁷ This cruciform approach to ministry that is marked by humility, service, and dependence on grace is not an optional posture, but the very foundation of pastoral leadership and Christian vocation.

At its best, shared ministry reflects a cruciform model of leadership—one shaped by the humility, mutuality, and self-giving love revealed at the cross. Rather than asserting control or maintaining hierarchical distance, clergy engaged in this type of ministry embody Christ-like leadership by nurturing the gifts of others, empowering the laity, and fostering authentic partnership within the body of Christ. This not only reflects the theological vision of the priesthood of all believers, but also creates space for innovation, transformation, and deep spiritual growth. As I. K. Williams argues in his research on collaborative ministry⁵⁸ within rural Anglican parishes in England, such leadership is marked by a shift from a *subject-object* relationship to a *subject-subject* one—where clergy and laity relate as equals, both fully human, fully called, and mutually accountable.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ 2 Cor. 12:9.

⁵⁷ Michael J. Gorman, "Cruciform or Resurrectiform? Paul's Paradoxical Practice of Participation in Christ," *Ex Auditu*, 2017, <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=2c511105-6dcc-397f-8f74-240e98d24fc8>, 73.

⁵⁸ One of the biggest challenges in researching shared ministry is that there is no uniform terminology that is used. A research librarian with whom I was working early on in my program to locate written material on the topic, suggested that this lack of consistent language meant that there was little written in this area. This lack of uniformity will be addressed in the following chapter.

⁵⁹ Ian K Williams, "Enabling Collaborative Ministry in Rural Anglicanism," *Rural Theology* 2, no. 2 (2004): 90, 99.

In his study, Williams sought to answer a central question: “What are the clergy-people relationships in rural Anglicanism which enable and support collaborative ministry?”⁶⁰ His research identified a persistent tension: while collaborative ministry is widely affirmed in principle, in practice the traditional, clergy-centered model still dominates, especially at the parish level.⁶¹ Historically, Williams notes, the vicar or parish priest has been seen as *the* ministry, a reality that theologian Gordon Kuhrt critiques as one in which clergy have “hi-jacked” ministry itself.⁶² Though Williams found that some progress has been made at the diocesan level, parish churches, particularly in rural settings, have been slower to adopt more collaborative patterns of leadership.

Central to Williams’ critique is the observation that collaborative ministry is often misunderstood. Many mistake it for mere delegation, which still preserves hierarchy and control. True collaboration, however, implies mutuality and partnership—shared authority and shared responsibility. Williams, citing Kuhrt, outlines three models of ministry: 1) the vicar as the sole minister; 2) the vicar with laypeople as helpers; and 3) a truly collaborative model.⁶³ Even within so-called collaborative schemes, however, laypeople are too often relegated to the roles of auxiliaries or pastoral assistants—terms that reflect subordinate, not equal, status.⁶⁴ Moreover, collaborative ministry is sometimes treated as a stopgap measure, a way to “fill a gap” in clergy shortages, rather than as a theological model of ministry in its own right.⁶⁵

The most significant finding in Williams’ research, however, was the impact of clergy who intentionally supported the personal and spiritual development of others.

⁶⁰ Williams, 90.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, 91.

⁶⁴ Kuhrt, 111.

⁶⁵ Williams, 91.

Clergy who relate in this way: ‘teach, share and encourage people in their daily lives, they show interest and appreciation, they encourage and affirm people and appreciate the efforts they make. They do not throw you in at the deep end but suggest ways of dealing with things and offer training and resources. They are helpful in explaining ministry and are aware of people’s feelings, strengths and weaknesses, and can see the potential in people. They enable others to see the possibilities, gently stretching them to their full potential, ready to pick up the pieces if it goes wrong (but positively). They wish to transform others and themselves, seeing learning as a lifelong endeavour and valuable for themselves and others’.⁶⁶

In short, these clergy lead not by control, but by accompaniment. They create space for laypeople to flourish, not just function.

By contrast, Williams also identified clergy whose leadership styles stifled collaboration—those who clung to clerical formality, used their position as a barrier, rejected dissenting voices, resisted innovation, and governed by rigid rules.⁶⁷ These leaders reinforced hierarchical structures and discouraged lay engagement, ultimately undermining the potential of the whole church.

Williams concludes that collaborative ministry flourishes when clergy relate to others not through the formal lens of office, but in the fullness of shared humanity. When clergy are willing to meet others in their lived realities with all the vulnerability, uncertainty, and beauty that entails, they mirror the way God meets us at the cross. This cruciform approach to ministry reflects the very nature of Christ’s self-giving love and invites the church into a more participatory, liberative form of leadership. It breaks down the walls of clericalism and gives flesh to the priesthood of all believers.

This is the same kind of collaborative ministry that Paul embodies in Philippians. Though imprisoned, he chooses to remain “in the flesh” for the sake of the church’s “progress and joy in the faith”, so that their “boast might abound in Christ Jesus” because

⁶⁶ Ibid, 94-95.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 97.

of him.⁶⁸ His presence is not hierarchical, but relational, rooted in love, sacrifice, and shared joy. Ministry in this mode, when led by those who seek to nurture rather than control, becomes a means of transformation, a space where life emerges from death through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is here that the church can truly become what it was always meant to be: a living, breathing body of Christ, in which every member is valued, every voice heard, and every gift set free for the sake of the world.

⁶⁸ Phil. 1:25-26.

CHAPTER 3 - THE RESEARCH

Shared ministry, joint ministry, multi-parish ministry, collaborative ministry, multiple churches, multiple parishes, yoked congregations—the terminology goes on and on. It is a concept marked by an abundance of terms, but a lack of unified language to speak about the nature of collaborative work and partnership between congregations. This linguistic fragmentation reveals something deeper: that this form of ministry, despite its growing relevance, often remains hidden in the broader conversation about the Church's mission. One might even wonder whether the hiddenness of shared ministry signals its unimportance. Or whether, more profoundly, it mirrors the hidden, grassroots work of the Holy Spirit.

What makes shared ministry distinct is that it is not initiated by institutional hierarchy, but arises from the ground up. It is a grassroots movement—organic, local, and responsive that emerges from congregations and ministries doing the everyday work of the church.⁶⁹ Perhaps this is why it is so difficult to categorize, name, or even find it in research. It resists systematization because it depends on humility, collaboration, and the relinquishing of control. And perhaps this elusiveness is exactly what aligns it so deeply with the nature of the Spirit's work, which is hidden, surprising, often unpredictable, and always transformative.

The grassroots, Spirit-led nature of shared ministry and its resistance to hierarchy and formal structures raises important questions about how it is both perceived and practiced within the life of the church today. To explore these questions and better understand the lived experiences of those engaged in this work, I turned to my own

⁶⁹ Belcher, Helen, "What Is a Shared Ministry," *Ecumenism* 111 (September 1993): 5, <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.pts.edu:2443/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000875872&site=ehost-live>.

context and designed a research methodology to examine and challenge my assumptions. In line with the twofold nature of my research question, the study proceeded in two steps.

First, I sought to interrogate my own perceptions—specifically, the belief that shared ministry is often viewed as a last resort for struggling congregations, and that pastors are reluctant to serve in such partnerships due to this stigma and a perceived increase in workload. To test this assumption, I gathered input from rostered leaders serving in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod of the ELCA. This was done in two phases: an initial online qualitative survey followed by in-depth interviews with a smaller group of participants. At the time of the survey, the sample included 290 ministers of Word and Sacrament (pastors), twenty-four ministers of Word and Service (deacons), as well as one bishop and seven synodically authorized ministers.⁷⁰

The second phase of this first step of the research process involved engaging in qualitative interviews with pastors who are currently serving in shared ministry contexts. Initially, I intended to identify the participants for these interviews through the synod's shared ministry group, which holds hybrid monthly meetings. However, during the course of the research, I identified other rostered leaders engaged in shared ministry who were not active in this group. As a result, I decided to broaden the parameters slightly to also include them as possible candidates for an in-depth interview if an interest in being interviewed was indicated. Finally, I also included a few that had not served in a shared

⁷⁰ In the Indiana-Kentucky Synod, synodically-authorized ministers, or SAMs, are lay members that have risen into leadership in the church and who have discerned a call into rostered ministry. The former bishop, Rev. Dr. William Gafkyjen, was instrumental in starting the Transformational Leadership Academy which offers a one-year lay worship leader program, as well as, supporting the formation of candidates in TEEM (Theological Education for Emerging Ministries), a partnership with Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. Candidates in both the one-year program and the TEEM program are considered synodically-authorized ministers and serve in their home congregations as lay ministers. This allows them to move toward rostered leadership, while still supporting themselves and their families in other full or part time work. I decided to include SAMs in the research as I thought they might bring a slightly different perspective toward shared ministry.

ministry setting, but who had indicated an interest in it to learn more about why they were open to the possibility.

The second step of my research involved qualitative ethnographic work with members of the two congregations I served in Louisville. My goal was to understand how they perceived the shared ministry arrangement in which we had been engaged since 2021, both prior to and following the formal implementation of the shared ministry agreement in January of that year. Initially, I planned to gather this data solely through an online qualitative survey, mirroring the approach used with rostered leaders. However, insights gained during those earlier interviews with rostered leaders prompted me to expand this phase of research with congregation members. As a result, I conducted additional interviews with selected congregational members from both communities to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of their experiences and perspectives.

Before implementing my research and consistent with seminary policy, I submitted my research protocol proposal to the Institutional Review Board of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, which can be found in Appendix A. The proposal was approved by the IRB as submitted with no required or suggested changes.

Project Implementation

I began the process of implementing my project by downloading a recent directory of rostered leaders in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA. This included leaders in both Word and Sacrament, and Word and Service.⁷¹ I then entered all the data from the directory into a spreadsheet. This was done to prepare an email merge with an invitation and link to participate in the survey.

⁷¹ In the ELCA, leaders of Word and Sacrament are ordained pastors and leaders of Word and Service are most commonly known as deacons or deaconesses.

An online survey, with an option for anonymity, was prepared for distribution via electronic means to those rostered leaders. Email addresses were available for all of the leaders in the synod directory. Participants were given the option to participate in a more in-depth qualitative interview at a later stage of the research. I created an initial survey form and sent it to my readers for review. After receiving their comments, I made a few edits as they suggested.

Given my own struggle to find common terminology for this topic, I began the survey with a clear definition of shared ministry to ensure that all participants had a common understanding of the concept. For the purposes of the survey, the term “shared ministry” (sometimes referred to as “yoked congregations” or “multi-point parishes”) was defined, as follows:

Shared ministry is a collaborative model of ministry that extends beyond a single congregation to encompass two or more congregations under the leadership of a shared pastoral leader or leaders. This approach recognizes the interconnectedness of faith communities and seeks to leverage their collective resources and strengths to enhance their ministry impact. In shared ministry, the pastoral leader serves as a bridge between the participating congregations, providing spiritual guidance, leading worship services, and offering pastoral care to all members. The pastoral leader plays a crucial role in fostering unity and collaboration among the congregations, aligning their missions and goals while respecting their unique identities and traditions.

Following this definition, the rostered leader survey included a number of demographic questions that included the participant’s length of time in rostered ministry, gender identity, age, and current ministry setting. The survey then moved to a series of questions designed to elicit the perceptions and experiences of the rostered leaders. It closed with an inquiry as to whether the respondent was willing to participate in a more

in-depth conversation. A full copy of the rostered leader survey is available in Appendix C.

Via email, I sent the rostered leader survey to a combined total of three hundred twenty-four (324) rostered leaders. I received twenty-four emails that were returned. I contacted the Synod office and utilized the ELCA's rostered leader directory to retrieve updated email addresses for those for which the email had bounced. I re-sent the survey email to these remaining twenty-four.

I initially received survey completions from ninety-four rostered leaders, which I preliminarily reviewed. I also began to identify key themes and other important understandings that arose in the data and engaged in the process of organizing and coding the data for later organization and consideration. This included looking more thoroughly at arising themes and their relationship to sample demographics. I also responded to a few email inquiries from survey participants. Then, I sent a second, follow-up email request to colleagues who had not yet responded.

After the follow-up request, I reviewed the second round of rostered leader survey submissions. In this second round, I received forty-nine additional submissions. Overall, I received a total of 143 responses, a completion rate of approximately 44 percent. An anonymous listing of the dates and times of those responding is included in Appendix D.

The second step of this research methodology involved engaging in more qualitative, ethnographic research. This stage focused on gaining a deeper understanding of how members from the two congregations I served perceived the shared ministry experiment in which they had been participants. To begin, I completed a congregational survey, using the same definition of shared ministry as that used in the rostered leader

survey. The survey began by seeking demographic information from the congregant, including age, gender identity, relationship to the congregation, and the length of participation or membership. I then moved to perceptions, seeking a comparison with their experience to the shared ministry definition, along with seeking the participant's perspectives on shared ministry before and after the agreement and implementation of the partnership. I also questioned member perceptions of whether or how their gifts had been utilized in the congregation, providing opportunity for anecdotal experience. Similar to that sent to rostered leaders, this survey closed with an inquiry of willingness to participate in a more in-depth online conversation. A copy of the survey sent to congregation members can be found in Appendix E.

Following the congregational survey, I selected and scheduled interviews with a small, diverse sample of members from both congregations who had indicated a willingness to participate in their survey responses. The selection process was designed to include a range of perspectives, with participants including members who are actively involved in the ministry of the church, as well as those who are less actively engaged.

Interviews were also planned with rostered leaders. I reviewed rostered leader survey results and selected potential participants for longer interviews, based on answers that each candidate had given to the initial rostered leader survey. I initially hid demographics to make the determination based on responses to questions, then reviewed demographics of potential interviewees to ensure balance. I continued reviewing rostered leaders' responses for potential interviews. I narrowed it down, first, to fifty potential interviews. Then, I reviewed these fifty by demographic data to ensure a balance of age, time in ministry, gender, and current call. From these fifty, I sent emails to ten survey

participants, requesting interviews and was able to schedule seven. I responded with an email providing an online form to gain IRB consent, a copy of which is included in Appendix B. I provided a Zoom link for the video conference. I also reviewed congregational survey responses to determine potential interview candidates and sent similar scheduling emails.

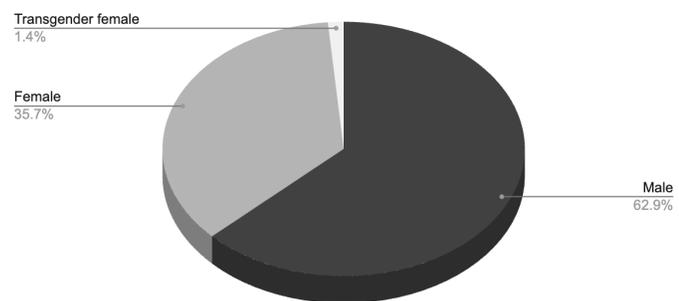
Interviews were conducted via Zoom with both rostered leaders and congregation members. The interviews were based on answers that each candidate had given to the initial rostered leader or congregational survey. Although my intent was to ask each candidate a list of specific questions, I decided to deviate from this plan. Instead, after reviewing survey responses, I invited more free-flowing conversation around their perceptions and experiences related to shared ministry. After each interview, I reviewed my notes and summarized key findings.

Project Results - Rostered Leader Survey

Respondent Profile and Demographics

A total of 143 rostered ministry leaders participated in the survey. Respondents represented a wide range of experience levels and ages, though the sample skews toward seasoned leaders.⁷² About two-thirds of respondents are male (approximately 63%), while one-third are female (36%

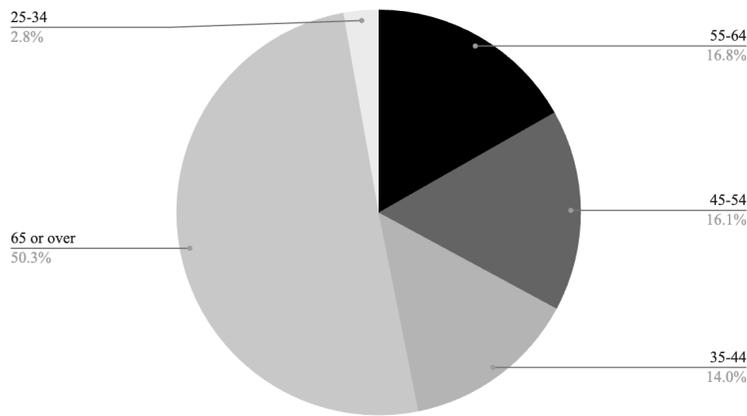
Figure 1. Gender Identity Distribution



⁷² This is generally consistent with the rostered leadership of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod and the broader ELCA, which skews older.

female, and a small number identifying otherwise), as reflected in Figure 1. The majority are older—over half were aged 55 or above, with “65 or over” being the largest age group at about 50% of respondents, while only a small fraction (under 3%) are under thirty-five

Figure 2. Age Group Distribution



(Figure 2). Experience levels vary, but many have long careers: roughly one-quarter have served more than 40 years in ministry, and about 60% have over 20 years of experience.

Newer leaders were present as well, with around 10% in their first five years of ministry. This mix of ages and tenures provided a broad perspective, though it tended toward veteran leaders.

Overall Perceptions of Shared Ministry

Overall, sentiment toward shared ministry was positive. When asked about their perception of shared ministry, nearly two-thirds of respondents (around 61%) described their view as “positive.” A substantial minority (38%) indicated a “mixed” perception—meaning they see both pros and cons or have some reservations. Only 1-2% (just two individuals) reported an outright “negative” perception of shared ministry.

This indicates that virtually no one is completely opposed to the concept; most leaders are at least open to it and many are enthusiastic. In open-ended comments explaining their views, even those with mixed feelings often acknowledged potential

benefits alongside their concerns. For example, some noted that shared ministry offers valuable collaboration opportunities but also “comes with hard conversations and potential for conflict,” reflecting a level of cautious optimism. Overall, the data shows broad support for the idea of shared ministry, tempered by awareness of its challenges.

Current Involvement and Willingness to Participate

Relatively few respondents are currently in a shared ministry arrangement, but many more have considered or tried it. About 17% (25 out of 143) reported that they are currently serving in a shared ministry setting, meaning they are already engaged in leading some level of partnering congregations. The remaining 83% are not presently in such a setting.

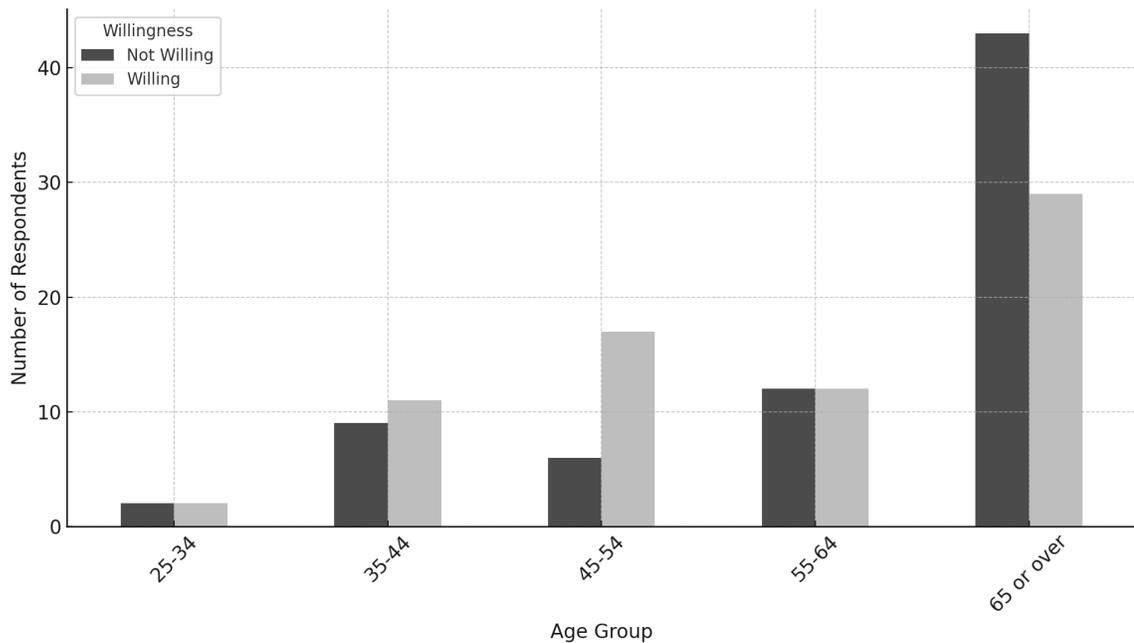
However, over half of all respondents have experience exploring the idea: 55% said they have suggested the possibility of shared ministry to a congregation they serve or served in the past, while 45% have never suggested it. In other words, the majority have at least raised the idea at some point in their ministry, indicating that shared ministry is on the radar of many leaders even if it hasn't been implemented in their context.

When it comes to future willingness, the survey showed a generally high openness: roughly 60% of respondents indicated they would consider serving in a shared ministry partnership (this includes about 16% who noted “I already do” as their response). Only around 12-13% gave a firm “No”--these were often leaders who are retired or nearing retirement, or who have personal reasons for not taking on a shared ministry role. The remaining respondents provided conditional answers, neither an outright yes nor no. Many of these wrote in comments like “It would depend on the specifics of the context” or “Not at this time,” suggesting a maybe—that they might

consider it under the right circumstances. In fact, thirty-two of those who did not say yes explained that they are retired, nearing retirement, or in non-parish roles (e.g. chaplaincy) and thus not looking for such positions, rather than objecting to shared ministry in principle. Three rostered leaders who had negative past experiences (such as a previous multi-congregation call that “burned me out”) were understandably hesitant, while others said they would be open to it again if certain issues could be addressed.

Willingness also varied by age group (Figure 3). Mid-career leaders, especially those aged 45-54, showed the highest level of openness, with nearly three times as many expressing willingness compared to those who were not. The 25-34, 35-44 and 55-64 age groups were more evenly split, suggesting a mix of openness and hesitation. In contrast,

Figure 3. Willingness to Serve in Shared Ministry by Age Group

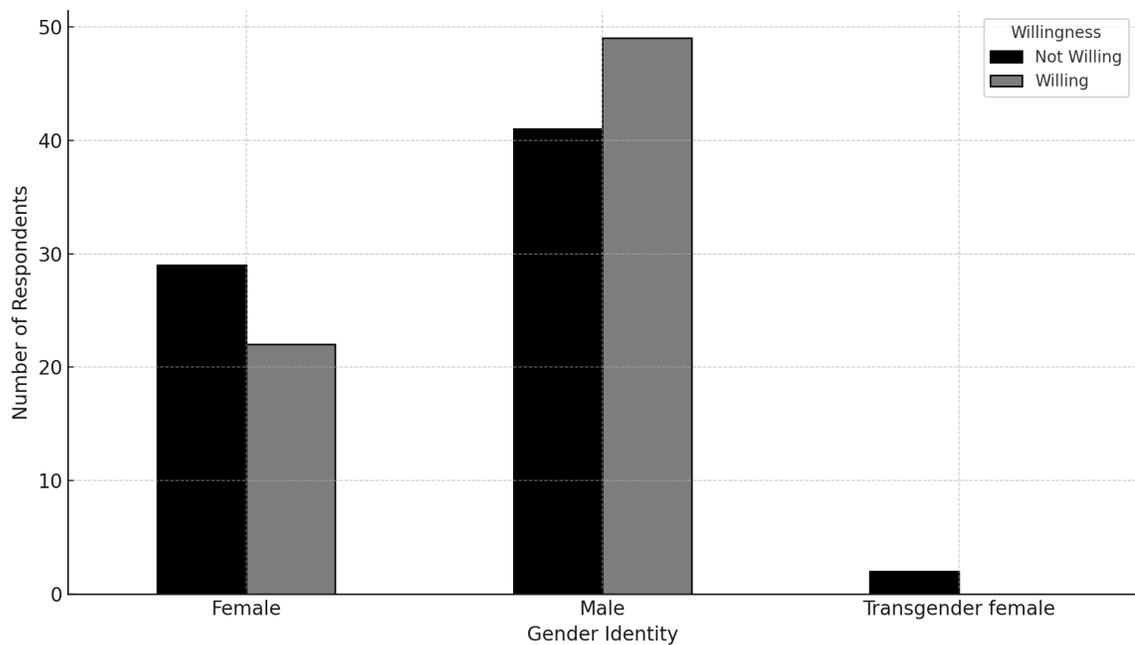


the 65 and over group had the highest number of respondents who were not willing to serve in a shared ministry, indicating a clear trend of decreasing interest as age increases.

Overall, willingness peaked in mid-career and declined with age, though willing respondents could be found in every group.

Willingness also differed by gender identity (Figure 4). Among respondents identifying as female, a majority (29 out of 51) indicated they were not willing to serve in a shared ministry partnership. Male respondents showed a more even split, with a slight majority (49 out of 90) indicating willingness. Two respondents identified as transgender females, and both indicated they were not willing to serve in a shared ministry setting. These results suggest some gender-related differences in openness, with male respondents

Figure 4. Willingness to Serve in Shared Ministry by Gender Identity



showing greater willingness overall, and female respondents leaning more toward reluctance.

Overall, willingness to participate is fairly high, especially among those actively in parish ministry roles, with most seeing shared ministry as a viable option they would embrace if needed or if asked.

Motivations and Perceived Benefits of Shared Ministry

Why pursue shared ministry? Several clear themes emerged regarding what leaders see as the major drivers and benefits of shared ministry. Participants identified both practical necessities and positive opportunities that would lead congregations or pastors to engage in a shared ministry partnership.

Financial Sustainability and Staffing Needs: By far the most commonly cited motivation is financial necessity. An overwhelming majority of respondents (over 90%) indicated that congregations consider shared ministry because they are “unable to individually afford a full-time pastor.” Many churches face budget constraints, declining attendance, or heavy facility costs that make supporting separate full-time clergy difficult. Sharing a pastor (or other staff) between two or more congregations can free up financial resources and relieve budget pressure on each individual church. Related to this, leaders noted the current clergy shortage and difficulty finding pastors for every small congregation. Shared ministry can be a solution when a church is unable to find a pastor on its own. In some cases, it is not just about lack of money, but also not needing a full-time pastor (for example, two smaller congregations each may only require part-time ministry; together they can form one full-time position). This cluster of reasons—financial strain, economies of scale, and adapting to clergy availability—was mentioned repeatedly as a primary driver. Simply put, shared ministry can keep struggling congregations viable by pooling resources.

“Last Step Before Closing” (Survival Mentality): A significant number of respondents (about one-third) believe congregations often turn to shared ministry as a last resort to avoid closure. Comments like “It was either move into shared ministry or

close!” encapsulate this motivation. When a church recognizes that it cannot survive alone, due to severely dwindling membership or finances, joining with another congregation is seen as a lifeline. While this reason is somewhat reactive (born out of crisis), it is a real and common scenario. Several leaders noted that unfortunately “most [churches] enter into it for the wrong reasons...always reactive and never proactive,” indicating that survival needs drive many shared ministry arrangements. Even so, this survival strategy can indeed keep ministry going in places where it would otherwise end. The data suggests that preventing church closure is a frequent context for shared ministry discussions.

Better Use of Resources and Expanded Ministry: Many respondents view shared ministry in a positive light as an avenue for better stewardship and more effective ministry. Around two-thirds highlighted collaboration benefits, saying congregations might partner “to do more ministry with less resources.” By sharing not only pastoral leadership but also programs, ideas, and facilities, churches can extend their reach. Respondents spoke of better or more efficient use of resources—for example, combining efforts for youth ministry, Bible study, or community outreach so that each congregation is not duplicating the same work in parallel. One leader wrote that a shared arrangement is “an opportunity to do more ministry than any one congregation could do alone,” emphasizing synergy. Others noted it can free up resources for mission: money saved by sharing expenses can be redirected to new ministries or outreach that a single church could not afford on its own. In short, leaders recognize a proactive, missional benefit: shared ministry, when done intentionally, can make congregations collectively stronger and more efficient than they would be separately.

Collaboration and Mutual Support: Beyond just efficiency, respondents frequently cited the value of collaboration and mutual encouragement between congregations. About 68% chose reasons related to an interest in collaborating/partnering with other faith communities. Leaders believe that partnering congregations can learn from each other, share ideas and gifts, and support one another's faith life. Some described this as an expression of the wider church: a sense that the church is more than individual congregations and ministry is improved by sharing needs and benefits. Instead of each small congregation feeling alone, a shared ministry can foster a sense of unity. A few respondents even framed this in theological terms—for example, "We are called to share our gifts...and not be silos of faith." This indicates a view that collaboration itself is a gospel value, modeling unity in the body of Christ. Fellowship and community enrichment were noted as benefits; members from different churches get to know each other and work together. Essentially, shared ministry can build a wider sense of community beyond one's own congregation.

Leadership Development: Another positive theme was the development of lay leadership. Nearly half the respondents recognized that in shared ministry, because the rostered leader's time may be split or more limited, there is a greater need for lay members to step up in various roles. Rather than seeing this as a drawback, many saw it as an advantage, that it "seeks to more fully develop lay members as active disciples," which was one of several possible responses. By necessity, congregations in partnerships may train and empower lay people to handle certain tasks (administration, visitation, teaching, et cetera) that a solo pastor might otherwise cover. This not only eases the pastor's load but engages members in ministry and helps them grow. Some respondents

selected “lay member development” explicitly as a reason to pursue shared arrangements, suggesting that it can cultivate a healthier, more participatory congregation. In summary, empowering lay leaders and distributing ministry responsibilities is viewed as a beneficial outcome of shared ministry by many participants.

Expanded Mission and New Opportunities: A few respondents pointed out strategic or missional opportunities that shared ministry makes possible. For instance, one leader mentioned it could allow providing ministry on another campus or location—essentially a multi-site approach to reach a different neighborhood or town with the same mission. Others said it offers a chance to grow a shared identity in mission or undertake joint projects like community service, outreach programs, or even ecumenical partnerships (one person suggested exploring ties with other denominations). While these forward-looking motivations were less commonly cited than financial or survival reasons, a number of leaders clearly hope that shared ministry can be proactive and mission-driven. They emphasize that, at its best, a partnership is not just about maintaining what exists, but about sparking new ministry possibilities that a single congregation might not venture into alone.

In summary, respondents see both pragmatic and visionary reasons for shared ministry. The top drivers are pragmatic concerns of sustainability (finances, staffing, survival), but there is also strong recognition of positive benefits: better stewardship of resources, richer collaboration, and an enhanced ministry impact through unity. The data suggests that most leaders view shared ministry as a practical solution that, when approached with the right intent, can strengthen the church’s mission.

Major Concerns and Challenges

While generally supportive, participants did voice a number of concerns, challenges, and potential downsides related to shared ministry. Those who had “mixed” perceptions or hesitated to fully endorse shared arrangements often cited many major issues.

Conflict and Culture Clashes. The most commonly mentioned concern is the potential for conflict between congregations in a partnership. As one pastor vividly put it, without mincing words, “My experience is [that] congregations fight like warring stepchildren!” When two or more churches try to work together, differences in traditions, decision-making styles, or even personalities can lead to tension. Respondents worry about “hard conversations and potential for conflict” over everything from worship times and leadership decisions to how to allocate shared resources. If the congregations have mismatched cultures or sensibilities, it can be very challenging to get them on the same page. Several leaders noted past attempts that failed because resistance and rivalry arose: “There was always some resistance...we didn’t build on the new opportunities and foundations,” noted one, while another mentioned a case where one partner wanted to end the arrangement simply out of personal differences. This highlights that building trust and harmony between partner churches is not guaranteed and can be a painful process. Fear of conflict or loss of congregational identity looms large as a barrier for many.

Increased Workload and Burnout: Another major challenge identified is the strain on the pastor/leader serving multiple congregations. Several respondents noted that a shared ministry can quickly become “too much work” for one leader, “requiring too many hours” for one person to handle. Juggling the needs of two or more congregations

means extra meetings, multiple services or events, more travel, and managing multiple councils or committees. One leader who had served a multi-point parish confessed, “It was a lot... it burned me out,” indicating how taxing the role can be. The concern is that without careful boundaries, a rostered leader in shared ministry might face overload and burnout, especially if each church still expects a high level of attention. Some also worry that the complexity gets too complicated to serve multiple congregations effectively—keeping track of different communities’ needs and coordinating between them can become an administrative headache. In summary, leaders are concerned that while shared ministry solves some resource problems, it might create personal stress and exhaustion for clergy if not structured well.

Logistical Complexity: Tied to workload is the general complexity of administration in shared settings. Respondents pointed out practical difficulties such as coordinating schedules (worship times, meetings, programs across congregations), dealing with multiple sets of leaders and traditions, and geographical distance between churches. If congregations are far apart or in different communities, simple logistics like travel time can become burdensome. A couple of comments mentioned difficult settings indicating unique contextual challenges that might complicate partnerships. Additionally, merging or aligning governance structures can be tricky—each congregation has its own council, constitution, or policies. Leaders worry about how decisions get made jointly and who has authority, which can be confusing if not clearly defined. All of this adds up to a fear that a shared ministry could become unwieldy or inefficient if the complexity is not managed, thus negating some of the intended resource savings.

Congregational Buy-In and Resistance to Change: Many respondents noted that one of the biggest barriers is simply getting congregations on board with the idea. Even if a pastor sees the need, the congregation might resist. Indeed, among those who never suggested shared ministry, a top selection was “No interest on the congregation’s part.” Change is hard, and the concept of sharing a pastor or merging ministries can be unsettling for members. Some churches have a strong independent identity and fear losing autonomy or uniqueness. One leader mentioned that prior congregations “did not perceive a need to partner”--if members believe their church is doing fine alone (or are in denial about decline), they will not entertain the idea. In other cases, there may be historical rivalries or simply a lack of trust between neighboring churches, making collaboration unattractive. This reluctance or denial can stall any movement toward partnership until a crisis forces the issue. Leaders clearly recognize that without congregational buy-in, shared ministry cannot succeed, and generating that buy-in is a significant hurdle.

Motivation and Mindset (Survival vs. Mission): A subtler theme in the concerns is the mindset with which shared ministries are often approached. Several participants lamented that many congregations enter shared arrangements only grudgingly, with a “survival mentality” rather than a positive vision. If the partnership is seen merely as a desperate measure, it may carry a sense of failure or loss that hampers enthusiasm. One respondent observed that “the problem is that most enter into it for the wrong reasons and it is always reactive, never proactive,” suggesting that starting from a place of crisis can set a negative tone. Moreover, if one or both congregations feel forced into it, they may be half-hearted in cooperation, making conflict or withdrawal more likely. Leaders are

concerned that without a shared mission or clear purpose beyond survival, the partnership might flounder or foster resentment. This connects back to conflict issues—if the only goal is to keep doors open, churches might question whether the struggle of partnership is worth it. Essentially, a lack of positive, shared vision is seen as a critical challenge: it is hard to succeed if participants are not truly convinced of the benefits beyond just staying alive.

Undefined Roles and Expectations: Another challenge mentioned is when roles, responsibilities, and expectations are not clearly defined from the outset. If a shared ministry is formed without clarity on how duties are split, how decisions will be made, or what each congregation can expect of the pastor and of each other, it can lead to confusion and frustration. One leader who had a difficult shared ministry experience suggested that having clear, agreed mission and terms upfront is essential, implying that their situation lacked that, resulting in trouble. When things are left ambiguous, one church might assume the pastor will prioritize them, or members might be unsure “whose pastor” this is, et cetera. Miscommunication can easily arise without a clear covenant or plan, exacerbating other issues. Although not every respondent said this explicitly, several of the open-ended comments alluded to the importance of setting ground rules (which is essentially the flip side of noting it as a concern if not done). One can infer that a poorly planned partnership is a recipe for the challenges already noted (conflict, overload) to worsen.

In summary, the major concerns center on the human and organizational challenges of shared ministry: conflicts between different groups, overworking the leader, managing complexity, and overcoming resistance. These findings highlight that while the

concept has strong merits, successful implementation is difficult. Leaders are aware that without careful attention to relationship dynamics and clear planning, a shared ministry can falter despite its good intentions. The presence of these concerns in many responses explains why a significant portion of respondents remained “mixed” in their outlook – they see the promise of shared ministry, but they also know the pitfalls from either experience or observation.

Participant Suggestions and Best Practices

Alongside identifying concerns, many survey participants offered suggestions, insights, and best practices for making shared ministry work. In their open-ended answers, rostered leaders often suggested ways to address the challenges or important factors to consider, incorporated herein.

Start with a Clear Shared Vision and Mission. A recurring piece of advice is to ensure that all partner congregations develop a unified vision for their shared ministry from the beginning. Several leaders stressed that churches should agree on “why” they are coming together beyond just saving money – for instance, a common mission focus or ministry goals that they can pursue better together. One respondent noted they would only consider a shared arrangement if “everyone was clear how the relationship advanced the ministry of both congregations beyond just survival.” This highlights the importance of articulating a positive mission (e.g., joint outreach programs, stronger youth ministry, community impact) that gives the partnership purpose and energy. By spending time upfront to outline a shared mission and goals, congregations can enter the arrangement on the same page and with mutual hope, which can ward off some of the conflict and apathy concerns. The suggestion is essentially: be proactive and mission-driven, not just

reactive. If all parties see a compelling vision for ministry together, they are more likely to commit wholeheartedly and work through difficulties.

Establish Clear Roles, Agreements, and Expectations. Participants emphasized that clarity and communication are critical in shared ministry contexts. They strongly recommend creating a formal or informal agreement that outlines roles and expectations for the pastor(s), lay leaders, and each participating congregation. This includes defining how the pastor's time will be allocated, how joint decisions will be made, how finances will be managed, and what specific responsibilities each church will hold. One experienced leader noted that “clearly defined expectations for ministry” are essential before entering into any shared partnership. Addressing these details early on helps prevent misunderstandings and ensures that everyone knows what to expect. Several participants also highlighted the importance of setting boundaries to protect the pastor's workload—for example, by limiting the number of meetings or making it clear that the pastor cannot be present at every event or location. A well-crafted covenant or agreement can serve as both a roadmap and a reference point should challenges or disagreements arise. In essence, the consensus advice is to plan thoroughly and intentionally—don't wing it.

To support this planning, Appendix G is included, featuring a *Discernment and Discussion Guide*, along with a *Congregational Policies Discussion Guide* and a template for *A Covenant for Shared Ministry*. These tools, developed by Rev. Nancy Nyland for the Indiana-Kentucky Synod of the ELCA, are designed to help ministry partners engage in meaningful conversations, set clear expectations, and build strong, sustainable relationships from the start.

Foster Open Communication and Trust. Many respondents highlighted the need for strong communication channels and trust-building among all parties. Regular joint meetings of leadership, honest conversations about worries, and opportunities for members of different congregations to get to know each other were mentioned as ways to build a sense of team. One suggestion implied is to spend time on relationship building, not just administrative details. For instance, hosting combined fellowship events or joint Bible studies can help unify the congregations socially and spiritually. When issues do arise, addressing them openly and respectfully is important. Leaders implied that creating a culture where “hard conversations” can be had in a constructive way is key. Additionally, some advised being attentive to power dynamics—making sure no one congregation dominates and that all voices are heard. The underlying suggestion is that trust and goodwill are the glue of any shared ministry; thus, intentional efforts to build trust are vital. A few even suggested involving an outside facilitator or the synod/denominational leadership to help mediate initial conversations, ensuring fairness and openness as the partnership forms.

Focus on Collaboration, Not Just Convenience. Participants repeatedly underscored that shared ministry should be about active collaboration in ministry, not simply a convenient cost-sharing arrangement. One experienced respondent observed that shared ministry “works best when collaboration is the goal, not just survival.” In practical terms, this means congregations should actively look for ways to minister together, rather than operating in parallel silos. The suggestion is to develop joint ministries where possible: for example, combined worship on special occasions, unified confirmation classes or youth groups, shared outreach projects in the community, and the like. By

creating tangible collaborative activities, the partnership moves from theory to practice and congregations see real benefits. It also builds interdependence and reduces any us-vs-them mentality. Leaders are essentially advising: do not just share a pastor; share ministry. When people roll up their sleeves together in service or worship, it can break down barriers. This proactive collaboration can also help congregations discover new opportunities that they would not have attempted alone, thus reinforcing the value of the partnership.

Choose Partnerships Wisely and Proactively. Another insight from respondents is the importance of being strategic about partner selection and timing. Some leaders suggested that congregations (and church authorities) should consider shared ministry before a crisis hits, ideally when all parties are relatively stable and open-minded. Entering a partnership while both congregations are still reasonably strong can make it feel like a mutual venture rather than a hostile takeover or a bail-out. Additionally, a few comments indicate that not every pairing is a good fit. Factors like compatible theology, congregational culture, or geographic proximity matter. One pastor noted, “It depends on how well the congregations work in ministry together,” implying that churches should perhaps get to know each other through smaller cooperative efforts first (such as pulpit exchanges or joint events) to test compatibility. In essence, the suggestion is to be intentional about whom to partner with: seek out churches with a similar vision or community focus, and initiate talks early rather than waiting until desperation forces the move. By being proactive and discerning in forming partnerships, churches set themselves up for a more fruitful and less contentious shared ministry.

Leverage Support and Training. A few participants hinted at leveraging external support—for example, guidance from the denominational offices or peer learning from others who have done shared ministry. While not a dominant theme, the underlying suggestion is that congregations and leaders should not try to navigate this alone. They can learn best practices from successful shared ministries in other areas and possibly seek coaching. One comment referenced that a shared ministry did not go through because “it was not ignited by the synod office,” suggesting that having church body leadership actively facilitate or endorse the process can help. Therefore, a recommendation is to use available resources (consultants, denominational programs, or documented models) to avoid reinventing the wheel.

In summary, the survey respondents offered a wealth of practical advice for shared ministry. The consensus is that intentionality and communication are crucial: have a clear purpose, plan carefully, communicate often, and truly commit to collaboration. By following these suggestions—clarifying vision and roles, building trust, and being proactive—congregations considering shared ministry can greatly improve their chances of success and satisfaction in the partnership.

Differences Across Respondent Groups

The survey results revealed some interesting variations in perspective among different groups of respondents. While there was broad agreement on many points, factors such as a leader’s experience level, age, and current ministry context showed subtle differences in how they view shared ministry.

Experience/Tenure in Ministry. There is a trend that more experienced leaders tend to have a more positive view of shared ministry. For example, among those with

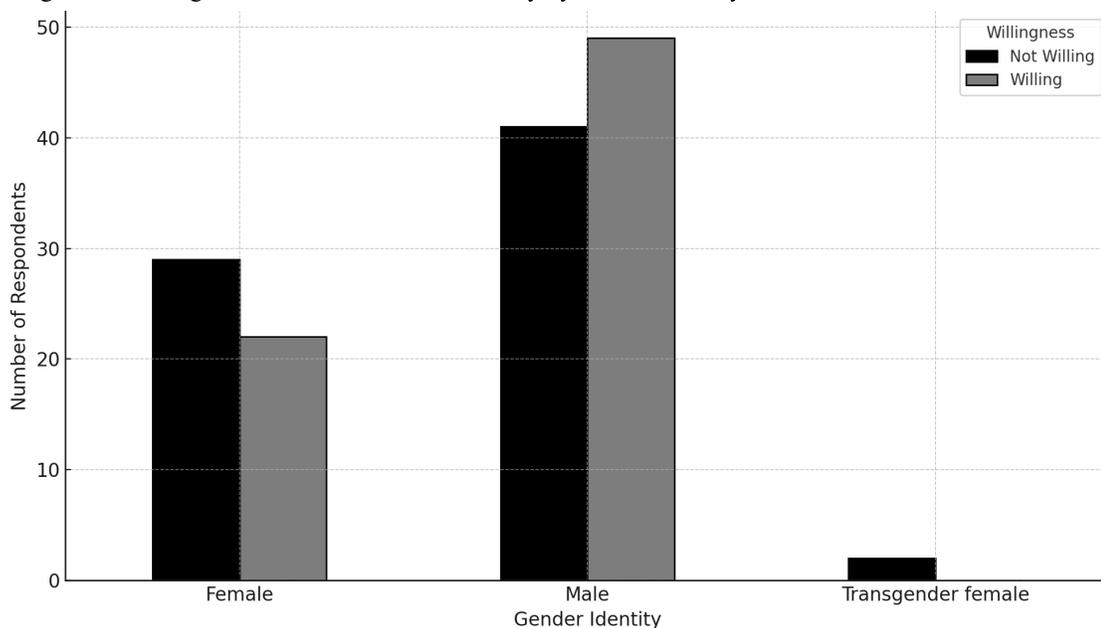
over 40 years in ministry (many of whom are likely retired or near retirement), nearly 80% described their perception of shared ministry as positive. Similarly, those in the 31-40 year range of experience were largely positive. In contrast, some mid-career leaders (around 6-15 years of service) were more cautious—this group had the highest proportion of “mixed” perceptions and relatively fewer outright positives. Newer leaders (0-5 years) were generally open to shared ministry (over half positive), but a notable portion also had mixed feelings and even a rare negative. This suggests that veteran pastors, perhaps having seen or served in multi-point parishes over the years, recognize the value in it (or see it as a normal part of ministry, especially in certain contexts). On the other hand, those in the early-to-mid career stage might be in the thick of congregational growth or have young families and thus feel more ambivalence, possibly concerned about the workload and complexity. The differences are not absolute, but the data implies that seasoned leaders may be more optimistic or accepting of shared ministry, whereas those with only a decade or so of experience show a bit more hesitation, balancing pros and cons.

Age Group. Patterns by age align closely with the tenure observations (since age and years of service are correlated). Older respondents were the most positive. About 72% of those age 65 or over held a positive perception, with very few negatives. The middle-aged group (particularly those 35-44 years old) stood out as the most reserved: a large majority of them (around 80%) reported mixed feelings, and this group had one of the higher incidences of negative sentiment (albeit still small). Those in the 45-54 and 55-64 brackets were in between, but leaned positive (roughly two-thirds positive vs one-third mixed). When it came to willingness to serve in a shared ministry, younger

leaders tended to say “Yes” or be open, whereas many older respondents answered “No” primarily due to being retired or close to retirement rather than opposition to the concept. In fact, several older pastors noted they “would have” or “have done so in the past,” but at this stage of life they are stepping back. Meanwhile, a few of the youngest respondents (under 35) who are early in their careers were split—some eager, some unsure—likely reflecting limited experience with the idea. In summary, older leaders (55+) are largely supportive of shared ministry as an idea, though many of those 65+ are not personally seeking new calls. Middle-aged leaders (30s-40s) appear to be the most cautious group, possibly balancing families and career stability concerns, whereas younger folks are generally open-minded but still forming their opinions.

Gender. There were slight differences in responses by gender (see Fig. 3 below). Male respondents expressed a higher rate of positive perception compared to their female counterparts. About two-thirds of male leaders surveyed viewed shared ministry positively, and interestingly, none of the male respondents indicated a “Negative”

Figure. 3. Willingness to Serve in Shared Ministry by Gender Identity



perception. Female respondents, on the other hand, were more evenly split between positive and mixed feelings. Roughly half had mixed views and the other half positive, with a small percentage (around 4%) noting a negative perception. This suggests that female rostered leaders may approach the concept with a bit more caution or critical eye, whereas male leaders more often embrace it outright. The reasons for this difference are not directly captured in the data, but one could speculate based on the comments: female pastors might be more attuned to relational dynamics or potential conflicts (as some research often finds differences in leadership style), making them more cautious about the challenges of shared ministry. It is also possible that some female leaders have encountered specific obstacles (for instance, being the sole pastor in a multi-church setting could carry unique challenges if one faces bias or differing expectations). Meanwhile, male pastors (who made up about 63% of respondents) might include more who have already participated in the historically common multi-point parishes and thus feel comfortable with it. It is important to note these are general tendencies; both men and women in the survey identified similar top reasons and concerns overall. But when comparing groups, women leaders had a greater proportion of mixed feelings, and the only outright negative ratings came from women. In terms of willingness to serve in a shared ministry, the gender differences were not stark—both male and female respondents included many willing and a handful not willing (often for practical/personal reasons). Thus, the gender disparity is modest but noticeable in tone: male leaders leaned more optimistic, female leaders more measured in their appraisal.

Current Shared Ministry Involvement. Unsurprisingly, those already engaged in a shared ministry at the time of the survey responded somewhat differently than those who

were not. Leaders with current shared ministry experience were among the most positive groups: about 68% of currently-serving respondents described their perception as positive, and the remaining were all “mixed.” Notably, none of the leaders currently in a shared ministry expressed a negative view of it. This indicates that first-hand experience tends to confirm the value of shared ministry for these pastors, even though about one-third still acknowledge a mix of pros and cons. By comparison, among leaders not currently in a shared arrangement, the positive rate was a bit lower (around 59%) and the only negative perceptions (those 1–2% of respondents) came from this group. It appears that actually doing shared ministry may alleviate some fears (since no current practitioner hated it). Or conversely, it could be that those who utterly dislike the concept avoid serving in such calls. In terms of willingness, nearly all of those already in shared ministry answered “Already do” or “Yes” to considering it in the future (which makes sense, as they are living it). Those not in a shared setting were split between yes, no, and conditional as described earlier. Another interesting point: some who have never been in shared ministry still advocated strongly for it (conceptually positive), whereas those with direct experience often offered the most nuanced insights on how to make it work (reflecting their lived experience of both benefits and difficulties). In summary, leaders with shared ministry experience are generally supportive of the model and can be considered a bit more confident about it, whereas those without experience show a wider range of sentiment from enthusiasm to hesitation. This suggests that exposure and experience might increase comfort with the idea—the concept becomes more tangible and manageable once one has actually led in that context.

Ministry Context (Role). Although the survey did not explicitly categorize respondents by role (e.g., solo pastor, associate, deacon, chaplain, etc.), some differences emerged based on context clues. Parish pastors (especially those serving smaller congregations) were the primary focus of the survey, and their answers drive the trends noted above. However, a number of respondents indicated they serve in non-parish roles or special circumstances, for example, interim pastors, chaplains, or retired status. Those not in a standard congregational call often cited that as the reason they have not engaged in or suggested shared ministry (“not serving in parish leadership,” “I was in specialized ministry most of my career,” “currently a chaplain,” etc.). In general, active parish pastors showed more engagement with the idea, either having suggested it or being willing to consider it, since it is most relevant to their work. Meanwhile, respondents who are retired or in specialized ministries often answered many questions as not applicable to them (or explained their unique situation). For instance, several retired pastors noted that they had experience with multi-point parishes in earlier years, even if they personally would not take on such a role now. If we interpret “role” broadly: those in primary pastoral leadership roles within congregations are the ones grappling with shared ministry questions day-to-day, whereas those in supporting or non-parish roles tend to have less direct stake (and often answered that the scenario had not arisen for them). Thus, any comparisons by role essentially reinforce that context matters: leaders serving small, rural, or struggling congregations were much more likely to be involved in or open to shared ministry (and see it as necessary), whereas leaders of large or multiple-staff congregations, or those outside parish settings, seldom needed to consider it. Indeed, a few serving larger churches said their congregations “did not perceive a need to partner

with another” due to their size/health. This underlines that perceptions of shared ministry’s importance can vary greatly depending on one’s ministry context: it can be a pressing reality for one leader and a non-issue for another in a flourishing single congregation or non-parish role.

In concluding the comparisons of the different demographic groups, the common ground across all demographics is that most recognize the potential of shared ministry, but the enthusiasm vs. caution balance shifts with experience, age, and context. Veteran and currently-participating leaders tend to be the most positive (likely seeing it work or having a long-term perspective of church needs), whereas some mid-career and female leaders voice more reservations, and, naturally, those whose context never required it remain neutral or uninvolved. Understanding these differences can help church bodies target support or education about shared ministry (for example, addressing the concerns common among mid-career pastors, or ensuring female clergy have networks of support in shared arrangements). Nevertheless, across all groups the survey indicates a generally favorable outlook on shared ministry as a concept and a willingness to consider it when appropriate.

Conclusion

The Rostered Leader Survey results paint a picture of cautious but clear optimism about shared ministry among clergy. Overall trends show that the majority of rostered leaders see shared ministry partnerships as a positive or at least viable strategy for the future of congregations, especially in the face of financial constraints and changing church demographics. Satisfaction levels with the concept are high, in the sense that very few reject the idea outright; most are either supportive or open-minded with some

reservations. Leaders identify strong pragmatic reasons to pursue shared ministries, chiefly to steward resources and sustain ministry where it might not continue otherwise and also lift up opportunities for collaborative mission and mutual growth that such partnerships can offer. At the same time, they are keenly aware of the challenges involved: conflicts can arise, the pastor's role becomes more complex, and success requires careful planning and genuine buy-in. Through their open-ended feedback, participants not only voiced concerns but also contributed valuable suggestions to mitigate those concerns, emphasizing the need for clear vision, communication, and proactive planning.

Importantly, the analysis highlighted that context matters. Differences in perspective emerge by experience level, age, and ministry setting, indicating that any approach to encouraging shared ministry may need to be tailored to address the specific hopes and fears of different groups. For instance, equipping mid-career pastors with examples of successful partnerships or providing conflict-resolution training might help convert "mixed" feelings into more confidence. Meanwhile, leveraging the positive experiences of those already in shared ministries (who can testify to what works) could mentor others considering it.

In total, the data suggests that shared ministry is widely seen as an important and largely positive avenue for congregations today. Rostered leaders recognize it as a practical solution to common problems and also as an innovative way to amplify ministry impact. The prevailing attitude is one of open-mindedness: pastors are willing to try new models if it means furthering the church's mission and reaching more people, so long as the known pitfalls are addressed. By heeding the insights and advice surfaced in this

survey, focusing on collaboration, thorough planning, and relationship-building, congregations and church leaders can approach shared ministry not as a desperate last resort, but as a faithful strategy for thriving together in a changing ministry landscape. The survey participants ultimately convey a message of hopeful realism: shared ministry is worth pursuing, and with care and God's guidance, it can bear fruit for the future of the church.

Project Results - Congregational Survey

The shared ministry between Grace & Glory and Third/MOSAIC has been a journey of transformation, fostering deepened relationships, enriched worship experiences, and greater opportunities for collaboration. For many congregation members, this partnership has been a source of renewal, offering a fresh perspective on faith and ministry. Survey responses and personal interviews reveal that while members greatly value the connections formed through joint worship and activities, they also express concerns about sustainability, evolving congregational identities, and the need for a clear direction moving forward.

Respondent Profile

A total of twenty-three congregational members participated in the survey. Respondents represented both partner congregations in the shared ministry. From Grace & Glory, there were thirteen respondents, primarily older adults with most over age 65 and many long-time members. This is reflective of the congregational demographic. From Third/MOSAIC, there were ten respondents. These include a mix of ages, including several young adults in their twenties and thirties, as well as some long-term members. This, too, is reflective of the demographic of this congregation.

There were other demographic highlights, including the wide range in age between respondents, from “25-34” up to “75 and over.” About half were seniors (65+) and half were middle-aged or younger adults. A majority identified as female, with the remainder male. One respondent identified as transgender male and one preferred not to say. Most respondents were members and regular participants in their respective congregations (78%). A smaller portion (22%) described themselves as occasional participants or non-member attendees. These less frequent participants tended to answer fewer open-ended questions and had slightly less strong opinions, although, overall, their perspectives aligned with those of regular attendees.

Overall Trends and Satisfaction Levels

General satisfaction with the shared ministry is high. Nearly every respondent characterized their overall perception of the partnership as positive. In fact, 96% of respondents described the shared ministry as “positive,” with only one person expressing a “mixed” view and none indicating a negative perception. Consistently, when asked to rate their experience, the average rating of the shared ministry experience was 8.7 out of 10, indicating strong satisfaction. All ratings fell between 7 and 10, with over three-quarters of respondents rating their experience 8 or higher. The most common rating was a perfect 10/10 (given by eight respondents). Even the lowest rating given was a 7, suggesting no one found the experience poor.

Optimism for the future of the church has grown under shared ministry. Participants were asked to reflect on their outlook for their congregation’s future before and since entering the shared ministry. Results show a clear upward trend. On a 5-point scale (5 being most hopeful), the average outlook “before” was 3.1, which improved to

3.9 “since” shared ministry. About 52% of members reported a more hopeful outlook for their church’s future now than they had prior to the partnership, while the other half said their outlook remained about the same. Notably, no one felt more pessimistic about the future—a strong sign that the shared ministry did not harm anyone’s hopes, and in many cases boosted them. Several long-time members who had been very concerned earlier now report feeling cautiously optimistic. One member explained, “Both congregations will still face challenges in terms of capacity, but the outlook looks a bit better than it did in 2020,” reflecting guarded improvement.

Personal involvement and use of gifts show more mixed trends. When asked if their talents and gifts are being “more fully utilized” in church ministry since the partnership began, responses were split: 47% answered “yes,” feeling more engaged and that their contributions have grown. Approximately 26% said “somewhat,” indicating a moderate or unclear change. About 26% responded “no,” experiencing no increase in the use of their gifts. Those who are deeply involved in church activities were more likely to say “yes”—for example, members who joined joint committees or leadership teams during the partnership felt their skills were put to use. One person shared, “The winnowing of our membership (as hard as it has been) pushed me to step into a role on Council. And the excitement and possibilities of our new venture has kept me engaged.” In contrast, some who answered “no” noted that their role in the church remained the same as before, or that personal circumstances (health, availability) limited greater involvement. As one long-time member observed, “I answered no simply because what I do has not changed in any way.” Another noted the partnership’s separation, saying “I

feel that we are now separate congregations again,” implying fewer opportunities to serve across congregations since each community returned to its own space.

Positive Outcomes and Common Themes

Survey participants highlighted numerous benefits of the shared ministry and positive experiences. A review of open-ended comments reveals several key themes that were mentioned repeatedly.

Stronger Community and Relationships: Members greatly valued the chance to form relationships beyond their own congregation. Many mentioned meeting new people and feeling like an extended church family. For example, one respondent shared that through worshiping together, “we became one big church family, and look forward to seeing each other.” Others echoed that sentiment, saying it is “always a pleasure to see the people from [our sister congregation] during joint worship.” The welcoming spirit and sense of mutual support were recurring themes, with many praising the atmosphere as warm, loving, and deeply affirming.

Enriched Worship and Diversity: The partnership brought together different worship styles, music, and perspectives, which respondents found enriching. Comments described worship as “more vibrant” and noted appreciation for shared music and musicians from both churches. Members enjoyed experiencing “different ways to worship” and learning from each congregation’s unique traditions and talents. “The different dynamics of each congregation brings a needed variety to worship,” one person wrote. This blending of traditions and diversity in the congregation (age, background, talents) was seen as a strength, creating a versatile worshiping community. As one member put it, “Same teachings—different delivery.”

Mutual Support and “Power in Numbers”: There was a strong sense that “two groups supporting one another” can accomplish more together than alone. Resource sharing was a practical benefit often mentioned. In particular, sharing expenses (such as the cost of pastoral leadership) helped relieve financial burdens on each small congregation. “We share the expense of having a pastor,” one respondent noted, which made ministry more sustainable. Likewise, combining forces for events and outreach meant better turnout and impact. One person observed that with a larger pool of people through two churches, “we have programming that otherwise may not have happened due to lack of attendance.” This indicates that joint activities (whether in-person or online) enabled ministry opportunities that a single congregation might not have been able to support on its own.

Learning and Growth: Members felt they learned new things and grew through the partnership. Some Grace & Glory members appreciated “looking at things through a younger group of people with varying talents,” as Third/MOSAIC brought fresh ideas. Conversely, Third/MOSAIC members gained experience from the established traditions of Grace & Glory. This “cross-fertilization” of ideas and approaches allowed each congregation to “live and grow in the ways it does best, while also allowing us to cross-fertilize each other.” A few respondents noted that being a small church meant everyone had to pitch in, which in turn helped individuals discover or develop their gifts (for example, taking on leadership roles in worship or church council for the first time). One member happily reported, “I’ve learned how to do more leadership roles during worship. I feel like my gifts are being used and my skills as a leader are being developed.”

Pastoral Leadership as a Bridge: Although the survey did not directly ask about pastoral leadership, many respondents credited their pastor's leadership as a positive factor. The pastor was frequently described as an effective "bridge" or connector between the two congregations. Several comments praised their pastor, mentioned by name, for her energy, creativity, and ability to unite people. For instance, one person wrote, "[She] does a good job making this work and finding ways to make this fun or enjoyable....Third/MOSAIC is so different from Grace & Glory in a lot of ways so it was good to worship and work with people we normally would not have." This suggests the pastor's efforts helped the two very different congregations collaborate smoothly. Strong and flexible leadership was seen as crucial to the success of shared ministry. As one member summed up, "a large part of shared ministry working is that we had leadership strong enough to be flexible and flexible enough to remain strong."

In summary, the overall sentiment was that the shared ministry brought new life, friendships, and opportunities to those involved. Words like "wonderful," "enriched," "positive," and "the more the merrier" peppered the responses. Even respondents who noted some negatives generally prefaced them by stating the experience was "more positive than negative" overall.

Major Concerns and Challenges

Alongside the positive outcomes, members also voiced concerns and challenges regarding the shared ministry. These concerns often centered on the practical difficulties of sustaining two small congregations and the adjustments required by the partnership.

Declining Attendance and Viability: The most frequent concern, especially among Grace & Glory members, was the small size and sustainability of their congregation.

Several respondents worried that membership and attendance are too low for the church to thrive long-term on its own. “Grace and Glory is struggling. The congregation is small, and small congregations don’t usually survive by themselves for very long,” one member cautioned. With limited people to take on responsibilities, some noted the risk of burnout among the active core. Others simply stated that both congregations “have limited participation” or “dismal attendance,” indicating anxiety about critical mass. Even with cost-sharing helping financially, a few respondents from Grace & Glory fear they “are losing a critical number to carry on.” This underlying worry about viability was a prominent theme in the open-ended answers.

Uneven Engagement and “Lopsided” Participation: A few members observed that the shared ministry experience sometimes felt uneven between the two congregations. For instance, during the initial phase when worship was held at a single site, it was primarily Third/MOSAIC members who traveled to Grace & Glory’s location. While this arrangement simplified logistics for the pastor, who then didn’t need to travel between sites, it may have placed a greater burden on Third/MOSAIC members in terms of convenience and accessibility. Now that Third/MOSAIC has its own gathering space, the dynamic has shifted, but one Grace & Glory member commented, “I feel that we are now separate congregations again,” suggesting that the sense of truly shared ministry has lessened with each on their own. There is a recognition that when not physically together, extra effort is required to stay connected (otherwise one partner might end up less engaged). In general, while both congregations are eager to help each other, the logistics of distance and separate schedules pose a challenge to equal participation.

Distance and Reduced Interaction: Now that the two churches no longer worship together weekly, geographical distance has become a barrier to spontaneous interaction. The congregations are about a 30-minute drive apart, so joint activities are typically planned rather than incidental. Respondents “miss worshipping regularly together” and noted that it is harder to share ministry when each site focuses on its own services. As one person lamented, “The distance between our gatherings now makes a difference in not [being] able to share our ministry.” The need to resort to online joint programming (to bridge the distance) was mentioned as a double-edged sword: it allows people to attend from both congregations, but some find online interaction less satisfying. One member explained that while online meetings “increase accessibility” for the two communities, “by being online and not in person, I’m less inclined to attend....I just don’t find connecting with others the same online as in person.” This indicates a concern that the quality of fellowship may suffer when face-to-face time is limited.

Need for Vision and Direction: Another challenge raised was the need for a clear vision or plan for the future, particularly for Grace & Glory. A few respondents felt that Third/MOSAIC had defined a vision for itself during the partnership (e.g. developing its unique dinner church model and community art gallery space), but Grace & Glory had “not really formulated theirs.” “There has to be an excitement about what we want to do and a willingness to work toward what we envision for the future,” one person wrote, implying that without a unifying mission, it is hard to generate enthusiasm. The partnership itself was seen as a catalyst for discernment—one Third/MOSAIC member noted that “sharing pastoral leadership allowed Third the room to engage in discernment and imagining a new future....had we not had the partnership, I think we would have

been constrained by...fretting about dismal prospects.” However, from Grace & Glory’s perspective, some uncertainty remains about their path forward now that the initial phase of shared ministry (joint worship) has passed. This suggests that a major concern is charting a sustainable, inspiring course for each congregation, even as they continue in partnership.

Leadership Transitions and Dependency: While current pastoral leadership was lauded, at least one respondent voiced concern about future leadership. The success of the shared ministry has been tied to a pastor who is adept at managing and nurturing two flocks. “We couldn't have done this with other pastors....I worry that we won't see that level of strength and flexibility in the future,” one member commented. This highlights a worry that the model might falter under a less capable or less compatible leader. It is a reminder that long-term sustainability of shared ministry may require structures and lay leadership that do not overly depend on a single individual’s skills.

Congregational Fatigue: Several comments alluded to exhaustion or burnout in both congregations. After years of change, pandemic challenges, and the work of establishing a new normal, people are tired. “Both congregations are tired and maybe we're not as open to creative ideas to help us succeed in the ways we want,” one person observed. Others mentioned stepping back from participation due to personal factors (“This was not the best time for me to participate more fully”; “my illness and age limit my participation”). Volunteer capacity is stretched thin, which is a concern for doing new joint initiatives or even maintaining current programs. This fatigue underlies the need to continually recruit and inspire new volunteers to prevent burnout in the few who carry the load.

Adjusting to Change: Especially on the Third/MOSAIC side, a few respondents noted the significant changes in worship style and setting that came with their congregation's new direction. Third Lutheran transformed into Third/MOSAIC with a creative model (dinner church in a gallery space), which is a big shift from traditional church. One Third/MOSAIC member (a former Catholic) admitted it was an adjustment: "I am very accustomed to a more formal worship....However, I am keeping an open mind and will do my best to serve more purpose." This highlights that even positive change can be uncomfortable for some, and there is a learning curve. The partnership made such experimentation possible, but it also means members must adapt to new ways of worship and ministry, which can be challenging for those who cherished the old format.

In summary, the major concerns center on sustaining momentum and connection: keeping both congregations viable, engaged, and united despite logistical and resource challenges. These issues temper the overall positive experience with a dose of realism about what needs attention moving forward.

Participant Suggestions and Insights

While the survey questions did not explicitly ask for suggestions, many respondents offered insights that point to ways to strengthen the shared ministry. Based on common threads in their feedback, several suggestions and lessons can be inferred.

Maintain Intentional Connection: A recurring point was the importance of being deliberate in staying connected now that the congregations meet separately. Members on both sides want to continue feeling like one extended family. They suggest planning regular joint activities, worship services, and fellowship events to supplement the current arrangement. This could help address the sense of distance. As one person advised,

“Good definition (of shared ministry) but [we] must be intentional about maintaining the relationship.” Regular combined worship (perhaps rotating locations) or shared service projects could keep relationships strong and combat the drift that distance creates.

Develop a Clear Shared Vision: Several members, particularly from Grace & Glory, indicated that articulating a clear vision and goals is important for the future. Engaging the congregation in a visioning process (if it has not happened yet) could spark the needed excitement and buy-in. The survey comments imply a suggestion that each congregation identify its mission and future direction within the partnership, and communicate it to members so everyone is working toward common objectives. This might involve leadership teams from both churches coming together to outline a roadmap for the next stage of shared ministry, ensuring neither congregation feels left behind on purpose.

Leverage Combined Resources Wisely: Respondents clearly appreciate the pooling of resources: financial, human, and creative. A suggestion gleaned from their comments is to continue leveraging the strengths of each congregation. For example, Grace & Glory’s established presence and building enabled MOSAIC to have a home when it needed one, and MOSAIC’s newer approaches infused creativity and younger energy. Identifying and emphasizing such complementary strengths (e.g. one church’s strong outreach program, the other’s music ministry talent) can benefit both. One respondent put it simply: “Two groups supporting one another and sharing our faith stories... when there are joint activities, they can do so much more together vs. trying to do it alone.” The implicit advice is to keep cooperating on ministries like education, youth events, service outreach, and not to retreat into fully separate silos.

Balance Online and In-Person Interaction: To overcome the geographical gap, some joint programs have moved online. Members suggest being thoughtful about this balance. While online offerings are inclusive, the value of in-person connection was stressed. A practical suggestion is to rotate in-person joint gatherings occasionally despite the 30-minute distance, so that relationships can be nurtured face-to-face. Meanwhile, for ongoing joint ministries like Bible studies or committee meetings, perhaps a hybrid approach can be tried, such as some sessions in person, some online. This could address the comment that exclusively online gatherings, though convenient, can leave some feeling disconnected or unmotivated to participate.

Encourage Broad Participation and Leadership: Given concerns about burnout, a clear suggestion is to involve more people in leadership and ministry roles. Several respondents noted that the partnership succeeded in part because lay members stepped up often out of necessity. Continuing to encourage members from both congregations to serve on joint committees, task forces, or exchange ideas can distribute the workload. For instance, one person expressed a desire to help more, saying “It would be awesome if I could help in any way I can—I mean more than usual.” This implies that there are willing volunteers who could be tapped with the right invitation or opportunity. Creating small joint teams for specific initiatives, such as worship planning, outreach, fellowship, and the like might both utilize gifts and strengthen cross-congregation bonds.

Plan for Leadership Sustainability: Given the concern about relying on a uniquely skilled pastor, it would be wise to prepare for future leadership transitions. This could mean developing internal leaders or a strong partnership structure that can adapt if pastoral leadership changes. For example, nurturing a culture of collaboration, where lay

leaders from both congregations regularly communicate and coordinate, can ensure continuity. The feedback suggests that having a pastor who acted as a “mediator” and “bridge” was key; therefore, any future clergy serving the partnership should be chosen with those skills in mind, or provided support to cultivate them. Essentially, members are hinting: “Don’t take our current success for granted—we need to be intentional to keep it going.”

Many of these suggestions revolve around communication, intentionality, and shared planning. The congregation members seem to understand that the partnership is at a turning point (no longer worshipping under one roof every week, but still together in mission) and they are voicing what it will take to thrive: continued fellowship, clear direction, mutual support, and broad involvement.

Summary

The results of this project, including gathering qualitative data from rostered leaders and congregation members in a shared ministry partnership, highlight that, while shared ministry is generally viewed positively, it is often approached reactively rather than proactively. Through surveys and interviews, the research identifies key benefits, such as financial sustainability, resource efficiency, leadership development, and enriched worship experience. However, challenges do remain. These are particularly related to conflict between congregations, increased pastoral workload, and concerns over long-term sustainability. While some leaders may see shared ministry as a necessary adaptation to changing church demographics, others remain cautious about its implementation due to its complexities.

Ultimately, the data received in this project underscores the importance of intentional planning, clear communication, and shared vision in ensuring the success of these partnerships. Rather than being viewed as a last-resort survival strategy, shared ministry has the potential to be a transformative model for churches navigating changing ministry landscapes. If it is approached with collaboration, flexibility, and strong leadership, shared ministry can strengthen congregations, enhance mission work, and foster deeper faith communities, ensuring the continued vitality of church ministry for future generations.

CHAPTER 4 - PROJECT EVALUATION

This journey of shared ministry that I have been on for the past nearly four years is not simply an academic exercise. It is deeply personal, shaped by my lived experiences in organizing, leadership, and pastoral ministry. It is a story of adaptation, resilience, and learning in a rapidly changing church landscape. From my early exposure to multi-point rural parishes in South Dakota, to my work in the diverse urban congregations of southern California and Texas, to the discernment of my call into pastoral ministry and my resulting move to serve Grace & Glory Lutheran Church in Goshen, Kentucky, and Third/MOSAIC in Louisville, I have witnessed firsthand the opportunities and challenges of congregations sharing leadership and resources.

In my first few years of ministry, shared ministry was a topic that arose in synodical conversations, but was rarely put into practice. Congregations discussed partnerships, but there seemed to be little structural or theological momentum to move beyond theoretical conversations. Most of the pastors I knew were too busy trying to “one-up” each other with new programs, new ideas, new anything, as we watched our congregations dwindle and our calendars get busier and busier.

All of this changed for me in 2018, when, as the pastor of a small congregation with a shrinking budget, I realized that the traditional model of congregational ministry was no longer sustainable. This realization led to the intentional pursuit of shared ministry, a journey that eventually connected the congregation I served with another. In time, and even in the midst of a pandemic, the pursuit led to a formalized partnership between the two congregations in 2021.

The research I conducted on shared ministry, as outlined in Chapter 3, is an exploration of what works, what does not work, and what we still need to understand—and there is still so much to learn. As I dug into this project, I was struck by how little writing or research exists on the topic. That gap led me to a realization rooted in my own experience growing up in the church: shared ministry has long been a natural, integrated part of rural ministry, an insight affirmed in a conversation with a seminary director of rural ministry. As I reflected further, I began to wonder if one reason that so little is written on shared ministry is because, frankly, we do not take rural ministry seriously enough in the wider church. Another reason, perhaps, is that shared ministry is so deeply woven into the fabric of rural congregational life that it's rarely examined as a distinct model—let alone considered a viable option for churches outside rural contexts. Maybe it's time we change that.

One of the most pressing questions to ask when evaluating a qualitative research project like this is whether it achieved its intended goals. At its core, this study sought to explore how congregations engage in shared ministry, whether as a desperate response to financial struggle or as a creative and intentional model for the future. It also aimed to understand how pastors and congregations perceive this approach and whether it can lead to meaningful renewal.

In many ways, the project was successful. The research confirmed that shared ministry is often seen as a necessary adaptation rather than an innovative opportunity. However, it also revealed that congregations with a clear mission, strong lay leadership, and a willingness to embrace collaboration experience greater long-term success. These findings align with my own experiences leading a shared ministry, reinforcing the

importance of proactive planning, and relational trust-building. It also requires developing a unified and shared vision, something I now realize I failed to do when serving in Kentucky. My focus there had been to engage in visioning with individual congregations rather than a both/and approach.

The study, however, raised new and unexpected questions. For example, while many pastors were open to the idea of shared ministry, very few had actually received formal training or resources to help them navigate its challenges. As noted earlier, there is little written on the topic of shared ministry because there has been minimal research done on it. Thus, there are no or few best practices available, even if a pastor might want to suggest such a step for their congregation. Formation in adaptive leadership, mediation and negotiation skill-building, identifying leaders and developing volunteers—all of these were skills I learned in my organizing career that, I now realize, were critical to building the partnership between these two congregations. My prior vocational experience also deepened my capacity to be flexible and responsive, skills that came in helpful and that were noted by congregants as important to the formation of the partnership.

Similarly, the research showed that financial necessity was the most common driver for entering into shared ministry. This was certainly true in my own lived experience at Grace & Glory. However, the research also revealed something important: congregations that formed shared ministry partnerships for mission-related reasons—not solely out of financial survival—tended to report greater long-term satisfaction and sustainability.

The study also confirmed existing assumptions about the difficulties of shared ministry, such as the strain on pastoral workload,⁷³ challenges in merging congregational identities, and the risk of congregational conflict. However, it also brought to light unexpected insights, such as the emergence of lay leadership as a critical success factor, and the role of clear theological vision in sustaining such partnerships. These insights not only confirm the validity of the study, but also point to areas for future research and deeper exploration.

Looking ahead, the path for continued study and implementation of shared ministry is rich with possibility. As highlighted in Appendix F, many important questions remain unanswered. Future research could explore what makes some congregations more viable for shared ministry—factors like congregational size, theological compatibility, financial health, and lay leadership capacity all warrant closer examination. Further studies might also examine the long-term sustainability of partnerships, especially during pastoral transitions, along with the practical dynamics of navigating conflict, congregational identity, and shared governance.

Theological reflection also remains an essential component of this future work. Exploring shared ministry through the lens of ecclesiology and the embodiment of the body of Christ could yield valuable insights into its deeper implications. Questions around the priesthood of all believers, collaborative mission in post-Christendom contexts, and the eschatological dimensions of partnership invite richer exploration.

Rather than viewing shared ministry as a fallback for struggling churches, future research

⁷³Interestingly, this may not be an accurate assumption. A research study conducted among clergy serving “yoked congregations” in the Presbyterian Church (USA) found that, contrary to conventional thought, such a call reveals no statistically significant differences in burnout levels between clergy serving yoked congregations versus those serving single congregations. Cf. Leslie J. Francis, Mandy Robbins, and Keith Wulff, “Are Clergy Serving Yoked Congregations More Vulnerable to Burnout? A Study among Clergy Serving in the Presbyterian Church (USA),” *Stress and Health* 29, no. 2 (June 4, 2012): 113–16.

can help frame it as a Spirit-led model of renewal—one that is deeply rooted in the church’s earliest practices and profoundly relevant to its future.

These insights not only confirm the validity of the study, but also point to areas for future research and deeper exploration. All of this is well and good. And it is important information. However, to fully appreciate the implication of these findings, it is crucial to examine them through a theological lens. After all, shared ministry is not simply a sociological idea, but a practice rooted in the life and mission of the church. Therefore, more important is whether the theological foundations I laid for shared ministry, explored in Chapter 2, offer a compelling framework for evaluating the findings of this project. We are the church, after all!

The primary theological foundation I offered for this study is drawn from Paul’s existential struggle in the first chapter of Philippians. Even as he faced what he perceived to be a life-and-death situation, his letter to the church in Philippi is marked by joy and deep gratitude for their mutual support. While imprisoned, Paul received both financial and emotional aid from them—acts of generosity and partnership he acknowledges explicitly in his writing. In his letter to the Romans, we also learn that the Philippian church, along with other congregations in the region, contributed to supporting the believers in Jerusalem. Clearly, Philippi was a congregation that understood the value of partnership and lived mutuality in action.

We should also consider Paul’s model of pastoral leadership. While he spent extended periods with the communities he helped establish, he never stayed indefinitely. In many ways, Paul functioned like a circuit rider—a term often used in the context of early American Christianity. One of the false assumptions we hold in the modern church

is that the current model—one pastor in every pulpit—is the norm. It is not. When congregations are no longer able to afford a full-time pastor, they often internalize that reality as a failure, which can easily become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Yet the biblical model, particularly as seen in Paul’s writings, emphasizes collaboration and shared ministry. The early church was built on interdependence. Paul consistently encouraged Christian communities to support one another, share resources, and work collectively in the mission of the Gospel.

But, lest we stray too far afield, we must return to the striking biblical text that informs this discussion in Philippians 1. It is here where Paul reflects on the tension between life and death, struggle and purpose. Writing from prison, he acknowledges his desire to depart and be with Christ, yet also recognizes that remaining in the flesh is more necessary for the sake of the community. It is a similar struggle that churches face when considering shared ministry. Do we continue on as we always have, or do we embrace a new reality—one that requires sacrifice, but that also brings with it the promise of transformation?

Shared ministry, at its core, is an embodiment of this death and resurrection pattern that Paul speaks of. Congregations are often hesitant to enter shared ministry because it may feel like a loss of identity, control, and independence. Yet, as Paul reminds us, choosing to remain engaged in the work of the church—choosing to endure rather than resign—creates opportunities for renewal and new expressions of ministry.

This theological perspective is particularly relevant to the findings of this study. Shared ministry is not merely a logistical arrangement—it is a theological statement about the nature of the church. When congregations come together in partnership, they more

fully embody the New Testament vision of the body of Christ, where different members work together in unity. This theological grounding is crucial for reframing shared ministry not as a necessary evil or last resort, but as a faithful expression of Christian community.

Likewise, Luther's understanding of the priesthood of all believers challenges the hierarchical structures that often dominate church governance. In shared ministry, the traditional dependency on a singular pastor is disrupted, creating space for lay leaders to step into new roles. This redistribution of leadership is not just a practical necessity, but a theological imperative—a return to the early church model where all members actively participated in the work of the Gospel. Paul, throughout his writing, consistently emphasized that the church is not defined by its structures, but by its people. Shared ministry, when approached with theological intentionality can become a way of enfleshing community, embodying the reality that the church exists beyond buildings, beyond traditions, and beyond formal and hierarchical leadership structures.

The collective insights from rostered leaders, from the two former congregations I served, and from my own personal experience and learning suggest that shared ministry, when implemented thoughtfully, can be a highly effective model for sustaining and expanding church communities. While challenges abound, particularly in managing expectations, workload, and congregational culture, many leaders see shared ministry as an essential tool for the future of the church.

The key takeaway is that shared ministry is most successful when it is pursued proactively rather than reactively. When leaders and congregations enter into partnerships with a clear, theologically-grounded mission, structured governance, and a commitment

to relationship-building, shared ministry has the potential to be more than a survival strategy; it can be a model for flourishing in a changing religious landscape.

CONCLUSION

The greatest question that remains is whether shared ministry represents a creative edge for further exploration. Does this model offer a future opportunity for new and imaginative forms of ministry? Does it have eschatological significance, pointing toward the church's future?

I believe it does. Shared ministry is not just about adapting to scarcity—it is about discovering abundance in community. It is about breaking free from rigid, institutional models of church and embracing a more flexible, relational, and Spirit-led way of being the body of Christ.

As I look to the future, I see endless possibilities for what shared ministry can become. What if we reimagined pastoral ministry as a team-based model rather than an individual calling? What if congregations across denominations explored interfaith shared ministries more fully, broadening the definition of church itself? What if shared ministry became a missional movement, rather than just a survival strategy?

This study has reinforced my belief that the future of the church is not in isolation or competition, but in connection. It is not in maintaining old structures, but in building new relationships and ways of being. Shared ministry is not just a response to decline—it is an invitation to innovation.

Shared ministry is one pathway into that future. And I, for one, am eager to keep walking it.



APPENDIX A
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
Institutional Review Board
Research Protocol Proposal

1. **Date of submission:** November 1, 2023
2. **Name(s) and contact information**
 - a. Karleen A Jung (karleenajung@gmail.com)
 - b. Faculty Advisor/First Reader: Dr. Jennifer Kaalund
 - c. *New Life Through Shared Ministry*
3. **Research period (beginning and ending dates)** November 15, 2023 through December 31, 2023
4. **Nature and purpose of the research (what you hope to learn and why)** The nature of the research will be twofold; first, to interrogate the truth of my belief as to how the idea of shared ministry is perceived (i.e. as a last resort for congregations) among pastors throughout our synodical body and to learn about the experience of pastoring multi-point parishes from pastors who currently serve in shared ministry settings. The second aspect of research will be to interrogate the members of the two congregations I currently serve. These two communities of faith have been yoked together since 2021. I will explore their perception of this work together and its impact on the life of both congregations, individually and collectively.
5. **Research methods and procedures**
 - a. Among pastoral colleagues, the research will consist of two methods. For pastors throughout our synod, including those serving in shared ministry settings, an electronic survey (Google Form) and paper survey will be distributed with the following three structured questions:
 - i. 1) What is your perception of shared ministry?
 - ii. 2) What, in your opinion, would lead a rostered leader to suggest shared ministry to their congregation? *and*
 - iii. 3) Would you ever consider serving congregations in a shared ministry partnership? Why or why not?
 - b. From the synod-wide responses, I will select 2-3 pastors currently serving in shared ministry settings to conduct a more qualitative, semi-structured interview via an individual Zoom conversation, asking these three questions:

- i. 1) What is your perception of your ministry in your multi-point parish context?
 - ii. 2) How has your ministry style changed in response to serving multiple congregations? Or has it? *and*
 - iii. 3) What is your greatest obstacle in pastoring more than one congregation?
 - c. For congregants, the methodology will be two fold. First, a simple survey will be sent to all parishioners in both congregations. This survey will be provided in both electronic and paper form and will include the following structured questions:
 - i. What is your perception of the shared ministry partnership with our sister congregation?
 - ii. What was your perspective for the future of our church before the partnership with [sister congregation]? Has this partnership changed that perspective since we entered into shared ministry with [sister congregation]? How?
 - iii. Do you feel that your gifts are being more fully utilized in the ministry of the church since we entered into partnership with [sister congregation]? If yes, how? If no, why not?
 - d. From the congregational responses, I will select 2-3 congregants from each community for a more qualitative reflection on their responses. These individual interviews will be conducted either on Zoom or in a mutually-agreed neutral location. They will be open-ended and unstructured.
 - e. For pastoral colleagues, I will obtain an email and physical address for all rostered leaders from our Synod. This will be used to send the survey via both email and postal mail to each person identified, with a deadline for completion and return. For congregants, a similar methodology will be utilized.
 - f. Google Forms will be utilized for the initial surveys to both rostered leaders and congregation members. If any paper surveys are returned, I will input the data directly into the Google Form and then scan the paper copy for safe-keeping. For in-person or online interviews, with the interview subject's permission, I will record these using either the Zoom or a voice recorder. These will be transcribed using an OCR voice to text transcription service.
6. **Your relationship to potential participants (e.g., teacher, pastor, spiritual director, friend)** With those rostered leaders being surveyed, my relationship is collegial with most. Some are unknown to me. And some are my friends. For congregation members, I serve as their pastor and, in a few cases, act as spiritual director. A few I would consider friends.

7. Potential risks to participants

- a. Because I will not be surveying any vulnerable populations, there is no potential risk in this area.
- b. For congregation members, the harm may be feelings of discomfort. Respondents may not want to disappoint me as their pastor. They may also not want to disappoint congregational leadership.
- c. For both participant groups, an infringement on privacy may be of concern.
- d. For those research subjects participating in more qualitative interviews, I will get informed consent at the outset before proceeding. This informed consent will outline that participation is completely voluntary, that their perspective and input is valuable and will be protected, and that confidentiality will be preserved if any information collected is used in my project. I will also make clear in the informed consent process that their participation is not required and that the services I provide as their pastor will not be impacted by a decision to participate or not.

8. Potential benefits to participants The potential benefit for both groups is a changed perception on shared ministry, either through thoughtful consideration and reconsideration of one's perspective on this topic, or through reflection on actual experience.

9. Assurance of confidentiality and anonymity

- a. Anonymity will be assured by changing names and redacting any personally-identifiable details as necessary. This will require great care within the congregations I serve, as both are very small and congregants are well known to each other. Recognizing this, I will work to carefully code data thematically as it is collected to find areas of similarities and differences, plus other themes and patterns that can be more broadly summarized.
- b. Confidentiality will be assured through the storage of all research data on my personal Google drive in a separate folder marked "Research" that is password protected. At the close of my project, I will delete any research materials that are personally-identifiable.

10. Informed consent (Please attach any consent forms you intend to use.) Informed consent for qualitative interview subjects will outline that participation is completely voluntary, that their perspective and input is valuable and will be protected, and that confidentiality will be preserved if any information collected is used in my project. I will also make clear in the informed consent process that their participation is not required and that my role as their pastor and the services I provided will not be impacted by a decision to participate or not.

11. Dissemination of research (e.g., sharing a summary in class, presenting findings to a congregation(s), publishing your work) I intend to share the findings of my research with both of my congregations and with rostered leaders in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod. Because I think that this may be helpful to the broader Church, I may also seek to publish my work through a denominational publishing house.



APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
Doctor of Ministry Program

INTRODUCTION:

My name is Karleen Jung, and I am a Doctor of Ministry student in the Doctor of Ministry Risking Faithful program at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. My phone number is 502-530-0385. My email is karleenajung@gmail.com.

My research advisor is Dr. Jennifer T. Kaalund. Her phone number is 412-924-1386. Her email is: jkaalund@pts.edu. The study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary chaired by Dean Angela Hancock. Her phone number is 412-924-1453. Her email is: ahancock@pts.edu.

Feel free to contact any of us at any time if you have questions at any point about this project.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this research is twofold. First, I will be studying the perception of shared ministry among rostered leaders in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Secondly, I will be studying the shared ministry partnership of the two congregations I serve - Grace & Glory Lutheran Church and Third Lutheran Church. I'm trying to learn more about how shared ministry is generally perceived in our denomination, the qualities for and nature of ministry required to serve in a shared ministry context, and the actual experience of congregations participating in partnership together. The anticipated title of the study will be "New Life Through Shared Ministry."

PROCEDURE:

If you consent to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in the following ways and make the following commitments (e.g., be interviewed, be part of group sessions).

I may/will (circle one) also make an audio, video and/or written recording of your participation. If so, after the project is completed, I will destroy all audio and video recordings.

TIME REQUIRED:

The project will begin on November 15th and conclude on December 31st. You are being asked to commit to 2-3 hours of your time.

VOLUNTARINESS:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still decline to be part of any session or answer any question that you do not wish to engage. You are completely free to withdraw from the study at any time.

RISKS:

I anticipate the following risks:

1. For congregation members participating, the harm may be feelings of discomfort. You may not want to disappoint me as your pastor. You may also not want to disappoint congregational leadership.
2. You may have concerns around infringement of privacy.
3. In any human subject research involving self-disclosure, there is always the possibility that you may feel discomfort or distress in the course of the research. If this happens, please inform me immediately and decline to participate if you wish.

BENEFITS:

I anticipate the following possible benefits (in list form) to you and/or your congregation: a changed perception on shared ministry, either through thoughtful consideration and reconsideration of your perspective on this topic or through reflection on your actual experience.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY:

I will be the only researcher present during the study. I will be the only person who sees/listens to any of its recordings. I will not share personal information that you tell me you have decided you do not wish to disclose. When I write the final paper, I will use pseudonyms (made-up names) for all participants and/or code the data I have received in such a way that your name will not be associated with it.

SHARING THE RESULTS:

I anticipate that the results of this research will be shared in the following ways: 1) with the members of Grace & Glory Lutheran Church and Third Lutheran Church; 2) with rostered leaders throughout the Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA; and 3) through potential publication through the denominational publishing house of the ELCA. You can receive my research findings by emailing me at karleenajung@gmail.com.

There is the possibility that I may publish this study or refer to it in published writing in the future. In this event, I will continue to use pseudonyms (as described above) and I may alter some identifying details in order to further protect your anonymity.

BEFORE YOU SIGN:

By signing below, you are agreeing to participate in this project with the possibility of being audio-taped, videotaped, and your words being written in a final paper. Be sure that you are fully satisfied with the answers to any questions you may have before signing. If you agree to participate in this study, you will receive a copy of this document. I will keep a copy, and the original will be kept in print form for three years in the Office of the Associate Dean of Academic Programs and Assessment.

Participant’s printed name: _____

Participant’s signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Parent or guardian’s printed name: _____

Parent or guardian's signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher's printed name: Karleen A. Jung

Researcher's signature: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX C

ROSTERED LEADER SURVEY ON SHARED MINISTRY

Introduction. Individual responses to this survey will be held in the strictest confidence, although aggregate results may be shared in my project work. The deadline to complete this survey is Wednesday, December 20th.

For purposes of this survey, the term, "shared ministry," (sometimes referred to as "yoked congregations" or "multi-point parish") is defined here:

- Shared ministry is a collaborative model of ministry that extends beyond a single congregation to encompass two or more congregations under the leadership of a shared pastoral leader or leaders. This approach recognizes the interconnectedness of faith communities and seeks to leverage their collective resources and strengths to enhance their ministry impact.
- In shared ministry, the pastoral leader serves as a bridge between the participating congregations, providing spiritual guidance, leading worship services, and offering pastoral care to all members. The pastoral leader plays a crucial role in fostering unity and collaboration among the congregations, aligning their missions and goals while respecting their unique identities and traditions.

Thank you so much for assisting me in this research. If you are interested, you will be able to request a copy of my final project paper at the end of this survey form.

Questions:

- First Name
- Last Name
- Email Address
- Phone Number
- How long have you been in rostered ministry?
 - 0-5 years
 - 6-10 years
 - 11-15 years
 - 16-20 years
 - 21-25 years
 - 26-30 years
 - 31-35 years
 - 36-40 years
 - More than 40 years
- To which gender do you most identify?
 - Female
 - Male
 - Transgender Female
 - Transgender Male
 - Gender variant/Non-conforming

- Prefer not to say
- Other (space for open-ended response)
- What is your age group?
 - 18-24
 - 25-34
 - 35-44
 - 45-54
 - 55-64
 - 65 or over
- Are you currently serving in a shared ministry setting as defined above?
 - Yes
 - No
- What is your perception of shared ministry?
 - Negative
 - Positive
 - Mixed
- Say more.
- Why would congregations decide to enter into shared ministry?
 - Unable to afford building upkeep and maintenance
 - Unable to individually afford full-time pastor
 - Other financial reason (include below under “Other”)
 - Last step before closing
 - Interested in collaborating/partnering with other faith communities
 - Interested in lay development, living more fully into priesthood of all believers
 - Other (space for open-ended response)
- What, in your opinion, would lead a rostered leader to suggest shared ministry to their congregation? (space for open-ended response)
- Have you ever suggested this possibility to a congregation you serve(d)?
 - Yes
 - No
- Why or why not? (Choose as many as you like.)
 - No need financially
 - No interest on my part
 - No interest on the congregation’s part
 - Too painful/too much resistance (last ditch step before closure)
 - Better or more efficient use of resources
 - Collaborating with other faith communities
 - Lay member development
 - Other (space for open-ended response)
- Would you ever consider serving congregations in a shared ministry partnership?
 - Yes
 - Already do
 - No
 - Maybe (say more under “Other”)
 - Other (space for open-ended response)

- Why or why not?
 - Too much work/would require too many hours
 - Too complicated to serve multiple congregations
 - Interested in collaboration with other congregations
 - Seeking to more fully develop lay members as active disciples
 - Increased responsibility for too little pay
 - Other (space for open-ended response)
- After surveys have been returned, I will be contacting a select group for an in person or online interview of an additional 30-60 minutes. Would you be willing to participate in such an interview?
 - Yes
 - No
- I am interested in receiving a copy of the final project paper.
 - Yes
 - No

APPENDIX D

ROSTERED LEADER RESPONSES

Timestamp	Respondent #	Timestamp	Respondent #
12/11/2023 14:18:08	1	12/11/2023 15:14:12	29
12/11/2023 14:18:43	2	12/11/2023 15:17:51	30
12/11/2023 14:20:56	3	12/11/2023 15:18:10	31
12/11/2023 14:22:57	4	12/11/2023 15:23:41	32
12/11/2023 14:24:10	5	12/11/2023 15:24:32	33
12/11/2023 14:25:22	6	12/11/2023 15:24:38	34
12/11/2023 14:25:29	7	12/11/2023 15:39:32	35
12/11/2023 14:28:25	8	12/11/2023 15:39:47	36
12/11/2023 14:28:36	9	12/11/2023 15:42:10	37
12/11/2023 14:29:51	10	12/11/2023 15:43:28	38
12/11/2023 14:31:29	11	12/11/2023 15:48:22	39
12/11/2023 14:32:45	12	12/11/2023 15:52:47	40
12/11/2023 14:33:12	13	12/11/2023 15:54:30	41
12/11/2023 14:34:38	14	12/11/2023 16:07:12	42
12/11/2023 14:37:16	15	12/11/2023 16:07:55	43
12/11/2023 14:39:58	16	12/11/2023 16:17:25	44
12/11/2023 14:40:56	17	12/11/2023 16:21:57	45
12/11/2023 14:44:25	18	12/11/2023 16:22:06	46
12/11/2023 14:46:28	19	12/11/2023 16:23:12	47
12/11/2023 14:48:27	20	12/11/2023 16:28:07	48
12/11/2023 14:49:38	21	12/11/2023 16:29:06	49
12/11/2023 14:49:40	22	12/11/2023 16:40:24	50
12/11/2023 14:58:08	23	12/11/2023 16:48:45	51
12/11/2023 15:00:01	24	12/11/2023 16:53:12	52
12/11/2023 15:01:05	25	12/11/2023 16:54:40	53
12/11/2023 15:05:30	26	12/11/2023 16:59:00	54
12/11/2023 15:06:58	27	12/11/2023 17:27:30	55
12/11/2023 15:14:10	28	12/11/2023 17:44:32	56

Timestamp	Respondent #	Timestamp	Respondent #
12/11/2023 18:10:00	57	12/13/2023 10:19:32	87
12/11/2023 18:18:55	58	12/13/2023 12:40:17	88
12/11/2023 18:41:32	59	12/13/2023 14:15:38	89
12/11/2023 19:51:20	60	12/13/2023 18:22:38	90
12/11/2023 20:03:51	61	12/14/2023 9:40:46	91
12/11/2023 20:53:08	62	12/14/2023 10:59:54	92
12/11/2023 21:24:19	63	12/14/2023 17:49:06	93
12/11/2023 21:54:55	64	12/18/2023 16:24:39	94
12/11/2023 22:39:15	65	12/18/2023 16:29:07	95
12/11/2023 23:10:52	66	12/18/2023 16:33:43	96
12/12/2023 5:14:43	67	12/18/2023 16:42:46	97
12/12/2023 7:37:52	68	12/18/2023 16:43:46	98
12/12/2023 10:05:18	69	12/18/2023 16:49:30	99
12/12/2023 10:22:31	70	12/18/2023 16:51:54	100
12/12/2023 11:00:04	71	12/18/2023 16:55:25	101
12/12/2023 11:43:17	72	12/18/2023 17:12:36	102
12/12/2023 11:51:34	73	12/18/2023 17:13:06	103
12/12/2023 12:21:44	74	12/18/2023 17:28:04	104
12/12/2023 13:10:54	75	12/18/2023 17:36:15	105
12/12/2023 13:16:23	76	12/18/2023 17:46:05	106
12/12/2023 14:04:01	77	12/18/2023 17:52:12	107
12/12/2023 14:07:58	78	12/18/2023 18:02:21	108
12/12/2023 14:29:06	79	12/18/2023 18:07:24	109
12/12/2023 14:42:24	80	12/18/2023 18:40:11	110
12/12/2023 14:59:26	81	12/18/2023 18:41:25	111
12/12/2023 17:41:02	82	12/18/2023 19:05:47	112
12/12/2023 19:56:25	83	12/18/2023 20:13:42	113
12/12/2023 20:30:21	84	12/18/2023 20:40:41	114
12/13/2023 8:50:45	85	12/18/2023 22:14:43	115
12/13/2023 9:48:25	86	12/18/2023 22:30:40	116

Timestamp	Respondent #
12/18/2023 23:22:39	117
12/19/2023 5:37:04	118
12/19/2023 8:55:54	119
12/19/2023 9:11:42	120
12/19/2023 9:31:06	121
12/19/2023 9:40:28	122
12/19/2023 9:58:26	123
12/19/2023 10:48:20	124
12/19/2023 10:49:49	125
12/19/2023 11:05:44	126
12/19/2023 11:36:57	127
12/19/2023 12:12:58	128
12/19/2023 12:16:26	129
12/19/2023 14:16:28	130
12/19/2023 19:31:55	131
12/19/2023 19:33:25	132
12/19/2023 22:48:26	133
12/19/2023 23:35:06	134
12/19/2023 23:39:35	135
12/20/2023 10:04:43	136
12/20/2023 11:04:17	137
12/20/2023 12:51:37	138
12/20/2023 13:56:28	139
12/20/2023 14:04:56	140
12/20/2023 17:49:39	141
12/20/2023 18:16:34	142
12/21/2023 12:30:57	143

APPENDIX E

CONGREGATIONAL MEMBER SURVEY ON SHARED MINISTRY

Introduction. Thank you for your willingness to share your experience with shared ministry! This is an important aspect of my project research and it's important that you be completely honest. Set aside any concern over "hurting my feelings" and tell the truth about how you feel about your shared ministry experience. Remember, this is about your experience and no one else's. Completing this survey should take approximately 5-7 minutes.

For purposes of my research, this is the definition of "shared ministry" that I'm using: Shared ministry is a collaborative model of ministry that extends beyond a single congregation to encompass two or more congregations under the leadership of a shared pastoral leader or leaders. This approach recognizes the interconnectedness of faith communities and seeks to leverage their collective resources and strengths to enhance their ministry impact.

In shared ministry, the pastoral leader serves as a bridge between the participating congregations, providing spiritual guidance, leading worship services, and offering pastoral care to all members. The pastoral leader plays a crucial role in fostering unity and collaboration among the congregations, aligning their missions and goals while respecting their unique identities and traditions.

Questions:

- First Name
- Last Name
- What is your age group?
 - Under 18
 - 18-24
 - 25-34
 - 35-44
 - 45-54
 - 55-64
 - 65-74
 - 75 and over
- To which gender do you most identify?
 - Female
 - Male
 - Transgender Female
 - Transgender Male
 - Gender variant/Non-conforming
 - Prefer not to say
- What is your relationship with the congregation?
 - Member/regular participant
 - Member/occasional participant

- Non-member/regular participant
- Non-member/occasional participant
- Member/not current participating
- Newer visitor
- Other (space for open-ended response)
- In which congregation are you a member/participant?
 - Grace & Glory
 - Third/MOSAIC
- For how long?
 - 0-5 years
 - 6-10 years
 - 11-15 years
 - 16-20 years
 - 21-25 years
 - 25 years or more
- What is your perception of shared ministry with our sister congregation?
 - Negative
 - Positive
 - Mixed
- Say more (space for open-ended response)
- Do you think the definition of shared ministry above captures the nature of shared ministry with our sister congregation?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Maybe
- Why or why not? (space for open-ended response)
- Before we entered into shared ministry with our sister congregation, what was your perspective for the future of our church?
 - Response asks for rating between 1-5, with 1 being “dismal future” and 5 representing “exciting future”
- Since entering into shared ministry with our sister congregation, what is your perspective for the future of our church?
 - Response asks for rating between 1-5, with 1 being “dismal future” and 5 representing “exciting future”
- Say more (space for open-ended response)
- Do you feel that your gifts are being more fully utilized in the ministry of the church since we entered into shared ministry?
 - Yes (if yes, respondent was forwarded to “Utilization of Gifts” below)
 - No (if no, respondent was forwarded to “Non-Utilization of Gifts” below)
 - Somewhat (if somewhat, responded was forwarded to “Mixed Utilization of Gifts” below)
- Utilization of Gifts. How? (space for open-ended response)
- Non-Utilization of Gifts. Why not? (space for open-ended response)
- Mixed Utilization of Gifts. Say more. (space for open-ended response)
- Overall Experience. On a scale of 1 (worst) to 10 (best), how would you rate your experience of shared ministry?

- Is there anything else you'd like to add? (space for open-ended response)
- Would you be willing to participate in a 45 minute online conversation to more fully talk about your experience with shared ministry?
 - Yes
 - No

APPENDIX F

POTENTIAL AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND STUDY

Because so little research has been done in this area, there is a vast list of possible areas of study. Here are some potential areas for future research that could deepen and enhance the exploration of shared ministry.

1. Identifying Congregational Viability for Shared Ministry
 - What characteristics make some congregations more adaptable to shared ministry than others?
 - How do congregational size, financial health, theological alignment, and lay leadership strength impact success?
 - Can a framework be developed to assess a congregation's readiness for shared ministry?
2. Theological and Eschatological Implications of Shared Ministry
 - How does shared ministry align with Paul's vision of interdependent communities in Philippians and Corinthians?
 - What role does the death and resurrection paradigm play in shaping congregational identity through shared ministry?
 - How does shared ministry reimagine the Body of Christ in a post-Christendom world?
3. The Role of the Priesthood of All Believers in Shared Ministry
 - How does shared ministry redistribute leadership and redefine the pastoral role?
 - What new opportunities and challenges arise when laypeople take on more active leadership roles?
 - Does shared ministry accelerate or hinder the realization of Luther's vision of the priesthood of all believers?
4. Sustaining Shared Ministry Beyond Initial Implementation
 - What factors contribute to long-term sustainability of shared ministry?
 - What happens when the initial leaders of a shared ministry move on or retire?
 - How do congregations maintain mission clarity and prevent shared ministry from reverting into survival mode?
5. Conflict and Identity Negotiation in Shared Ministry
 - How do congregations navigate identity shifts when moving into shared ministry?
 - What are the most effective conflict-resolution strategies for theological, cultural, or governance disagreements?
 - How can congregations maintain distinct identities while also fostering deep collaboration?
6. Enfleshing Community: Shared Ministry as an Embodied Theological Practice
 - How does shared ministry shape the lived experiences of faith communities?

- Does shared ministry create a more tangible, incarnational experience of church?
 - How does this model impact spiritual formation, worship practices, and communal life?
7. Interdenominational and Ecumenical Shared Ministries
- What are the theological and practical barriers to cross-denominational shared ministries?
 - Can interfaith or ecumenical shared ministries serve as a new frontier for congregational vitality?
 - How does shared ministry challenge denominational identity and institutional structures?
8. Shared Ministry and the Future of Pastoral Formation
- How should seminary training and pastoral education evolve to prepare leaders for shared ministry settings?
 - What new leadership models emerge when pastors serve multiple congregations?
 - How does shared ministry reshape expectations of clergy work, well-being, and vocation?
9. Creative and Eschatological Explorations of Shared Ministry
- What does shared ministry reveal about God's ongoing work in the church?
 - How can shared ministry be framed as an act of faith in God's unfolding future rather than a reactive measure?
 - Does shared ministry prefigure new and unanticipated forms of Christian community yet to emerge?

APPENDIX G

Indiana-Kentucky Synod Shared Ministry Discernment and Discussion Guide

Shared Ministry in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod is described as two or more congregations sharing pastoral leadership (and perhaps other staff) while also sharing some mission and ministry.

What is Shared Ministry?

- It is NOT about closing, merging or making the congregations alike.
- It IS about maintaining the unique identity of each congregation while sharing leadership and jointly participating in some mission and ministry.
- It IS about being attentive to the Holy Spirit and the opportunities being offered for shared mission and ministry.
- It IS about having a full-time pastor that your congregation is sharing.
- It IS about freeing up resources to do mission and ministry.
- It IS about gifts. No matter how big or how small, each congregation brings gifts into the partnership.
- It is NOT about surviving...it IS about thriving.
- It IS about purpose. What is God calling your congregation to do and to be in the future? How will this shared ministry strengthen your mission and ministry? How will your congregation's relationship with God, one another and the world grow in this shared ministry?
- It IS about risk and experimentation. As Bishop Bill says, "Let's throw our loaves and fish on the table and see how God might multiply them."
- It IS about open communication and relationship building first with leaders and then with the entire congregation.
- It IS about establishing a high trust level between the pastor, the lay leaders and the congregations.
- It IS about compromise. What areas need compromise to make the shared leadership successful (i.e., worship times, midweek services, special services, annual meetings, etc.)? It is about strong lay leadership. How will lay leaders be responsible for tasks which previously were considered the pastor's responsibility?
- It is NOT about unseating a called pastor. If one of the congregations currently has a called pastor, this pastor will be the first candidate to be considered in the call process. It is about imagining and exploring various staffing models, as appropriate...ministers of word and sacrament (pastors); ministers of word and service (deacons); interns from seminary; shared administrative assistant, youth leader, music director, custodial staff, etc. It is about participating in a discernment process with another congregation(s) involving several meetings with congregational leaders facilitated by synod staff.
- It IS about developing a shared ministry covenant.

Shared Ministry Conversations
Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA
Congregational Policies Discussion Guide

It is helpful to have discussion about various policies that exist in the congregations who are moving toward Shared Ministry. These policies may be important to mention or to be able to respond to in a call process interview with a potential pastoral candidate.

Discussion around policies, practices and procedures:

- Building Use Policies
- Alcohol Policy
- Policies related to background checks
- Safety/Emergency Policy
- Emergency Pastoral Coverage Procedure (for worship, etc.)
- Worship Cancellation Policy
- Concealed Carry Policy
- Service/Comfort Animal Policy
- Sabbatical Policy
- Social Media Policy
- Is your website up-to-date
- Release form – Image Use
- Gifts Policy – acceptance and use of gifts to congregation
- Age of First Communion
- Age of Confirmation
- Constitution is updated
- Annual Audit of Church Financial Records
- Wedding Policies -- Policy on Gay Weddings/Marriages
- Openness to interviewing LGBTQIA+ candidates
- Other _____

Congregations may have some of these policies or none of them. If a congregation has all of them – way to go! The time to develop these policies is probably not the time when a congregation is between called pastors. Let this list create some conversation that will help congregations learn more about one another. This list can also be a helpful reminder of things to attend to when a called pastor is serving the congregation(s).

**A Covenant
for the Shared Ministry
of
(Name) Lutheran Church, (City, State)
and
(Name) Lutheran Church, (City, State)**

Seeking to build up one another in Christ and move forward in mission together, (Name) Lutheran Church, (City, State) and (Name) Lutheran Church, (City, State) covenant to engage in shared ministry together in the following ways:

1. **Continuity of Identity.** Although we are joined together as one in the Body of Christ, this ministry partnership maintains the distinct identities of each congregation. This shared ministry partnership is not a merger, consolidation, nor a dissolution of either congregation. Both churches will maintain their own constitution, budget, councils, and committee structures.

2. **Term of Shared Ministry Partnership.** Following approval of both church councils and both congregations, this ministry partnership officially began (date). Both congregations agree to continue engaging in this shared ministry partnership for _____ years. After _____ years, the shared ministry will continue on an annual basis with the approval of both congregations. Dissolution of the shared ministry partnership cannot be accomplished prior to consultation with the Bishop of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod.

3. **Sharing a Pastor.** One full-time pastor is shared between (Name of church) and (Name of church). The pastor will serve the two congregations based on a percentage of time in a work week: _____% time to (Name of church) and _____% time to (Name of church) respectively. Both congregations covenant to be understanding and flexible towards this percentage of time functioning as a *guideline* due to the nature of the office and duties of a pastor. Additionally, the pastor will covenant to be present for both council meetings at each church each month and both annual meetings at each church. The pastor will also covenant to participate and be available for (list any special events). Attendance at other activities and events will be discussed for the upcoming three months at each Joint Council meeting.

4. **Financially Supporting a Pastor.** (Name of church) covenants to provide _____% of the total cost of supporting one full time pastor and (Name of church) covenants to provide _____%. This percentage arrangement will be reviewed annually to determine if adjustments need to be made based on average worship attendance and/or financial means of each congregation.

(Name of church) will pay (name of church) their respective portion on a periodic basis as recommended by the respective treasurer's from each congregation.

The total amount of financially supporting a pastor will adjust slightly year to year based on changes in benefits and salary costs. The current IN-KY Synod Compensation Standards and accompanying spreadsheets can be found on the IN-KY Synod website: <https://iksynod.org/call-process/>. (Increases in salary and/or benefits beyond the annual increase in the IK Synod Compensation Standards will be approved by each congregation.)

Additionally, the pastor will maintain a log of mileage for church business and activities related to each congregation and submit mileage to each church for reimbursement on a monthly basis.

In circumstances where the pastor is incurring mileage for both churches (i.e. pericope group, ministerium, first call theological education, synod meetings, synod assembly, etc.) (Name of church) and (Name of church) covenant to share the cost of that shared mileage _____%/_____%.

5. **Worship.** Worship of the Triune God is the epicenter of congregational ministry. Although each congregation maintains their own regular Sunday services, opportunities for worshipping God together will be lifted up throughout our ministry partnership as well. Joint worship services may take the form of, but are not limited to: Mid-week Lenten services, holiday services (such as Thanksgiving and/or New Year's Day), select holy week services (such as Maundy Thursday and/or Good Friday), and 5th Sunday joint worship services. The Joint Council in partnership with the pastor will determine the frequency of these joint services.

Sunday Worship Service Times: Worship at (Name of Church) Lutheran Church will be at _____am and worship at (Name of Church) Lutheran Church will be at _____am. The pastor will be present at both congregations every Sunday, unless the pastor is on vacation or continuing education.

Other Service Times: There will be separate services at each congregation for Christmas Eve and Easter morning worship. These service times, and all other non-regular Sunday service times, will be discerned by both councils at Joint Council meetings.

6. Joint Council Meetings. Joint council meetings will take place four times a year (quarterly). The agenda for these meetings will include a time of devotion/spiritual growth, a time of deepening our relationships with one another, review of the progress of our shared ministry, discussion of ways to expand our shared ministry, and any additional items proposed by members of either church council or the pastor. Location of these meetings will alternate between each church. The host president will chair joint council meetings. Minutes of these meetings will be taken by the secretary of the council who is “hosting” that particular joint council meeting at their church.

7. Communication and Conflict Resolution. Both councils covenant to practice healthy communication and conflict resolution with one another and the pastor. As Christians, we understand this to take the form of Matthew 18 when we are in community with one another. Matthew 18 outlines the importance of addressing issues directly and compassionately, while uplifting the values of transparency, truth-telling in love, integrity, forgiveness, reconciliation, and prayer.

8. Shared Ministry. Both congregations will continue to explore ways to expand our shared ministry and mission together for the sake of God’s world, as well as ways to deepen our relationships with one another and our communities. This may take the form of, but is not limited to, youth group, confirmation instruction, Christian education, newsletter, outreach activities, etc. We can do more as church together!

9. Review of Shared Ministry. The effectiveness of this shared ministry partnership will be reviewed annually and discussed at a Joint Council meeting. Affirmations and recommendations regarding this shared ministry partnership will be discussed annually at the (Month) Joint Council. This meeting’s agenda will also include review of the covenant and all agreements listed within it.

Approved by the Congregation of (name) Lutheran Church:

Council President Signature: _____ Date: _____

Council President Name: _____

Approved by the Congregation of (name) Lutheran Church:

Council President Signature: _____ Date: _____

Council President Name: _____

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