

**Commission on Ministry
Presbytery of the James**

Parishes In The Presbytery

The Commission on Ministry (COM) of the Presbytery of the James has studied the formation of a “Parish” approach to address two recurring problems which a majority of the churches in this presbytery are now facing:

- The ability to call and retain ordained clergy.
- The cost of generic services required by every church.

COM is aware that more than 60% of the approximately 100 churches in our Presbytery cannot afford to call a minister because of the level of the Presbytery’s “Minimum Compensation Requirements.” Most of these churches have smaller memberships or are experiencing declines in membership and attendance. Most of these churches are faced with an aging membership and few youth. Yet, the needs for help in worship and pastoral services continue. To meet these needs, most of these churches are compelled to use one or more of the temporary relationships available within the Presbytery—covenant pastors or certified lay preachers or parish associates to meet some of their needs. And, unfortunately, many of our churches just do without.

COM has observed the competition for the available pool of part time ministers and certified lay pastors within the presbytery and is aware that filling the pulpit on a weekly basis and securing adequate pastoral care has led to times and periods of unmet needs, with attendant levels of pain and disruption.

Concern about this mounting problem led COM to consider what the Presbytery could do to help. In our study COM has learned that other presbyteries are experiencing this same problem and are addressing the issues raised in multiple ways. Of the approaches tried by others, one that has shown promise involves a hybrid structure requiring collaboration among the churches within a given geographical area overseen and led by the Presbytery. The model is best described as a “Parish” approach. COM has read and listened to many about this form of collaborative approach. There are positives and negatives, but the positives appear to far outweigh the negatives.

The positives identified include:

- Regular worship and timely pastoral care provided by a minister;
- Collaboration in shared interests;
- Cost savings;
- Continuation and revitalization of individual churches, and,
- Renewed abilities to engage in missions and outreach.

The negatives include:

- A possible loss of identity
- A possible loss of power
- A potential lack of effective leadership

A clear process for opting in and out

COM believes the positives far outweigh the negatives, and if properly structured, the negatives can be eliminated or rendered inconsequential. As it has studied and sifted the options, COM has focused on two separate parish models, which it is recommending Presbytery approve and use.

The two Parishes and the considerations for each are set forth below.

1. The "Spiritual Parish"

The concept here is for two or more churches in geographic proximity to form a Parish, which would function as the structure to provide each church involved with a minister or ministers shared with the other members of the Parish. The churches would be Presbyterian or churches in communication with the PC(USA).

2. The "Service Parish"

The concept here is for two or more churches, not necessarily Presbyterian, to form a service parish, which would provide each church with non-spiritual services that all separately incur.

1. The Spiritual Parish

Two or more geographically related churches can seek to form a Spiritual Parish, with an appropriate name, in which each church participating would have a voice and vote in establishing the Parish, in setting the operating parameters of the Parish, and, in any call process of that Parish.

- a. The voice and vote of each participating church shall be equal in the formation of the Parish. Once formed, the voice shall remain equal but the vote shall be proportional, based on a formula agreed upon by the participants.
- b. Each Parish will adopt by-laws for its operation, which may be amended from time to time. All by-laws and amendments shall be approved by the Presbytery. the by-laws of one Parish may differ from another, as the differing needs of each Parish may be determined.
- c. The formation of a Spiritual Parish shall not be deemed a merger of the churches involved. Each church joining the Parish will retain its independence, name, property, membership and powers, as established by the BOO.
- d. The Parish will be run by a council answerable to all of the churches participating and to the Presbytery.
- e. A Parish may call and/or hire ministers, certified lay pastors, educators, administrative staff and other employees, as needed.

- f. The Parish will determine job descriptions, be the actual hiring authority, and supervise the work of the ministers and educators through its council.
- g. Any ministers called must be approved by the Presbytery and thereafter be members of the Presbytery.
- h. Churches participating will agree to share the ministers/educators of the Parish within a schedule which assures each church will have at least two Sundays of live worship each month with the remaining Sundays of each month provided by electronic worship.
- i. Members of a Parish may join or withdraw from the Parish on the anniversary of the Parish's charter. Any member wishing to withdraw from a Parish must give 90 days' notice to the Parish and secure Presbytery approval.
- j. All of the churches within the Parish shall be connected electronically so that the live worship at anyone of the churches can be simultaneously transmitted/broadcast into any of the other churches. The cost to establish this electronic capability will initially be made available in the form of a grant from the Presbytery to the Parish for a minimum package approved for the Parish by the Presbytery. Any equipment or software purchased through Presbytery grant will be returned to Presbytery if its use is discontinued. Any enhancements or changes to the original systems adopted will be at the cost of the Parish or its members.
- k. If any of the ministers/educators called to or hired by the Parish are under 40 or are serving an initial call when they come to the field, the Presbytery will pay their benefits, leaving only the salary to be paid by the Parish for the first three years of their call. Any educational debt incurred by a minister or educator still remaining on the date the individual comes to the Parish will be paid off by the Presbytery in an amount not exceeding \$7500 annually, to be paid in equal sevenths over 7 years as long as the individual remains in the field. Should the individual minister or educator leave the Parish before the 7-year period of service ends, all remaining educational debt then unpaid will remain the obligation of the individual leaving.

2. The Service Parish

COM is aware that most churches have recurring expenses related to their operations which could be shared or pooled to help individual churches reduce operating costs. COM has been considering a second form of a Parish, called a Service Parish, which churches could join to share in a host of expenses. The concept includes the establishment of a legal structure which would allow churches to join or subscribe, from which each member church could select the services it would like to use from a menu of services available.

The Presbytery will not be involved in the day-to-day operations of the entity selected to serve as operator or manager, but the Presbytery may authorize the formation of such a Parish, and after doing so will retain sufficient involvement to assure that the churches joining such a Parish will act at all times in compliance with the Book of Order.

The legal entity recommended for the Parish is a limited partnership, in which there is a general partner approved by the Presbytery, and with memberships available to individual churches as limited partners. The limited partnership will limit the liability of each church participating and will provide a structure in which management and participation will be best enabled. A lawyer will be needed to create the partnership documents, which once developed, will be subject to presbytery approval. Each limited partner will make a capital contribution for their partnership interest and will be eligible for a return of its capital should it leave the Parish, subject always to the financial viability of the partnership at that time. Non limited partnership churches may be allowed to participate in using the services offered at prices set by the partnership, but non-partnership participation will have no voice in the operation of the partnership.

The services that will be offered will be set forth in menu form, so that each church/partner will be able to select the services it wants at pre-set pricing. The cost for each service and component thereof shall be determined by the general partner, in consultation with the advisory council of the partnership. The cost for any service subscribed to by a non-member of the service parish shall be higher than that charges to a limited partners. In the event the service partnership is profitable in any given year, some or all of the profits may be distributed to the members of the partnership at the sole discretion of the general partner.

The menu may include, but not be limited to:

- A. Bulletins – a common/generic bulletin format will be prepared for each week’s services and tailored for a particular participating church. The bulletin will be available in printed form or downloadable, as a church may request. Special bulletins will also be available, such as for funerals or special services.
- B. Newsletters – Preparation of the church’s monthly newsletter in printed form or downloadable.
- C. Secretary – the Parish will provide secretarial services for any church on an hourly basis weekly.
- D. Telephone – the Parish will have a central call-in, where each church’s phone will be answered 24/7/365 centrally, if not answered by a member church.
- E. Sexton – The Parish will provide sexton services through employees of the Parish. Hours/rates/availability/special events and other needs will be coordinated by the Parish.
- F. Outside Maintenance – The Parish will secure yard and garden personnel to serve each church as it may request. Regular grass cutting, landscaping, snow and ice removal would be a part.

- G. Property maintenance – For repairs and minor maintenance needs, the Parish will have available persons with the ability to address minor property issues. Major repairs will remain the responsibility of each member church.
- H. Payroll – The Parish will provide payroll services through a third-party vendor chosen by the Parish. The payroll service will include the creation and filing of all federal and state tax reporting forms for those for whom it provides payroll services.
- I. Treasurer – The Parish will provide a treasurer for any church requesting. The Parish will maintain an appropriate bond for those involved in this service and will provide monthly statements, write checks and provide at year's end an auditor to assure the finances of each church were properly maintained.
- J. Purchasing – The Parish will develop a central purchasing approach for those products and supplies used in common by its member churches.
- K. Security – The service parish will secure third-party security assistance and provide security evaluations.
- L. Electronics – The service parish will develop a menu of electronic packages a church may use and provide assistance in developing and establishing the electronic program of any subscribing church.
- M. Other services will be added to the menu as needs are defined.

The Service Parish will develop and post the costs for each service, taking into account the various levels of the service that might be subscribed to within each category.

Limited partners may opt in and opt out of the Service Parish upon 60 days' notice.

The service partnership will be available to Presbyterian and non-Presbyterian churches within a reasonable geographic area of the Parish Office.

The general partner will be paid a reasonable compensation for services rendered. The payment may be either a combination of salary and performance incentives, with a minimum amount guaranteed. Sales of solicited limited partnership interests will have a commission added for the seller.

All personnel of the service parish will be employees or independent contractors of the Parish. Neither the Presbytery nor any limited partner will have personal responsibility for these expenses, except as specifically agreed otherwise.

The limited partnership will be governed by a council of its members, subject to oversight of the general partner. Non-partner subscribers will not serve on the council.

Approved by presbytery: 10/15/2022