



SHARING MINISTRY ECUMENICALLY

CREATING AND SUSTAINING
ECUMENICAL SHARED MINISTRIES

Some Insights and Guidelines

A Study Text Produced by the
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INTRODUCTION

In Canada, the churches define an “Ecumenical Shared Ministry” (ESM) as a community of Christians serving God in a unified way while still maintaining their denominational identity and connections. It is any combination of denominations sharing a program, mission, ministry, or building. Shared ministries witness to our fundamental unity in Christ. They are often a pragmatic and creative response to the exigencies of being and maintaining Christian community in challenging contexts. They are powerful ministries, frequently complex to initiate, and they have inherent fragility that requires careful attention. They demand courage and patience. However, together our churches have found ways to navigate the complexities of shared ministries for over fifty years.

We have discovered that ecumenical shared ministries are rewarding and worth the effort. Our two churches live with “real but incomplete mutual recognition” of one another’s ministries, and that has led us to imaginative sharing opportunities.

What follows are some examples of the many shared ministries in which our two churches participate across Canada. These 10 brief vignettes highlight insights and themes that often apply in many shared ministry settings. We then gather the main themes that emerge from these examples, in the hope that they may guide and inspire you.

A TEN VIGNETTES



1. All Saints' Ottawa, ON – *Sharing a Building*

All Saints' Anglican Westboro, in Ottawa, was struggling, so wanted a conversation about amalgamating with other Anglican churches but encountered resistance to giving up the location. At the same time, First United, in the same neighbourhood, knew they needed to move and were considering selling. The two churches formed a partnership in 2007. The United Church congregation moved in as “partners” in the agreement. Anglicans still own the building, but each congregation has equal numbers on the joint property committee. They are two separate entities but do some things together. They split building costs and the cost of a custodian 50/50. The Diocese required a “Strategic Agreement” but otherwise has let the partnership unfold. There is a memorandum of understanding for the day to day operations, which is evaluated every 2 years; this process has run smoothly.

For both congregations, the partnership of sharing the building has freed up money for program and mission. The key to this was the Memorandum of Understanding. “What works well is that we share the space and give each other space,” says Brian Cornelius the United Church Minister. The Anglican incumbent, Christopher Dunn, says it is important at the beginning to have episcopal support. The Strategic Agreement and the Memorandum of Understanding are public documents and can be found on the website of All Saints:

<https://www.allsaintswestboro.com/partnership-with-first-united/>.

Highlights:

- The memorandum of understanding includes a clear review process.
- Episcopal support is vital from the outset.
- Mutual respect between communities makes the sharing work.



2. Christ Church Anglican and Knox United, Fernie, BC **– *Canada's Newest!***

On September 29, 2019 at Fernie B.C., a covenanting service began a shared ministry between Christ Church Anglican and Knox United. The two congregations began their sharing with two separate worship services and two separate buildings, but sharing the cost of an interim minister, whose task is to lead the congregations to work more closely together, and eventually to share worship and a building.

The service began at Knox for the “Service of the Word” and processed several blocks to Christ Church for Communion. Both the U.C. Regional Minister and the Anglican Bishop were present for the covenanting. Both denominational leaders were seated at the front of Knox. The Bishop began by saying how appropriate it was to have matching chairs, a symbol that they shared episcopal oversight for the shared ministry. Anglicans recognize episcopal ministry resided in a person, a bishop, while United Church recognized the same ministry of oversight residing in conciliar structure (committees). Quoting the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM) document of the World Council of Churches, the Bishop explained that the challenge BEM offers to those in ecumenical sharing is to recognize this “episcopal” ministry in each other. There was much nodding of heads at this explanation; it was clearly helpful to articulate these challenges as the shared ministry began.

The next day the two judicatories travelled together from this new shared ministry in Fernie, to the meet the search committee in one of Canada’s oldest shared ministries, Windermere Valley Shared Ministry.

The ministry began in the fall of 2019 as planned, with a long-term goal of worshipping together. However, the contingencies of COVID-19 have accelerated that timeline. The two congregations have been worshipping together via Zoom; the joint council plans to continue this pattern even when in-person worship becomes possible again. The congregations have

had a positive discovery of their adaptability. The experience of joint worship has helped allay the fears of loss of denominational identity, putting the focus instead on the many shared values and the gifts the other tradition brings.

Highlights:

- Public articulation and visual symbolism of the shared “episcopate” or oversight is important at the beginning of the covenant.
- A good relationship between the judicatory leaders helps create the foundation for healthy sharing.
- An external crisis can bring ecumenical partners into deeper sharing more quickly than they imagined for themselves.
- Once people experience joint worship, their fears of losing denominational identity can diminish as they discover the many commonalities and the gifts of each tradition.



3. Living Spirit Centre, Regina SK (Eastside United Church, St. Philip Anglican, Bread of Life Lutheran)

The Living Spirit Centre is a ministry of three congregations sharing a building. It grew into the present configuration when, in 1997, Prince of Peace United Church joined with Bread of Life Lutheran to share the building and the United Church became Eastside, and the building became the Living Spirit Centre. St. Philip Anglican joined in 2003 and together they developed a covenant and a joint owners' agreement for being together in ministry and space. The arrangement saves significant costs for the three congregations. The ministry presently has the three congregations sharing midweek Lent and Advent services together, 4-5 shared Sunday and seasonal worship services a year, shared summer services, and a new shared Messy Church program for families. The United Church presently is served by a Diaconal Minister, which presents some challenges for presiding at communion for shared services, for the Lutheran and Anglican denominations because Diaconal Ministers are commissioned, not ordained. The bishops from each regional body (Diocese and Synod) have given permission for their congregations to receive United Church communion from the minister. There is a strong commitment to ecumenism by the present clergy configuration, which makes shared ministry and programming easier.

Highlights:

- A strong commitment to ecumenical sharing increases opportunity for shared programming and ministry together.
- Shared space makes for more sustainable congregations.
- United Church diaconal ministers can serve in a shared ministry capacity, with cooperation and understanding from Bishops.



4. Emmaus Community, Victoria, BC

The Emmaus Community is a New Monastic community whose recognition of Christ in our midst leads them to walk the Way of love through prayer, simplicity and presence with each other and in our neighbourhood. It is a ministry of the Anglican Diocese of B.C. (part of the Anglican Church of Canada) and the Pacific Mountain Regional Council of the United Church of Canada, so they are ecumenical/inter-denominational in their membership, and welcome Christians and sojourners of all stripes into the conversation. They have one visitor who is a Bishop from within the Anglican Communion and one who is a leader in the United Church. These visitors are elected yearly by the community. The role of the Visitor/s is to hold a mirror to the community in terms of its common life and health.

A secondary role for the Visitor/s is to support and advocate for the Community in the wider structures of the Churches and ecumenically. The Visitors strive to be present to witness vows of Covenanting members and will strive to be available to the community leadership in times of need or crisis. It also finds great affinity with the Parish Collective, based in Seattle – who are seeking to support Christian communities which are rooting themselves in their neighbourhoods and recovering a sense of “place” in the “parish” — that is, the neighbourhood. They strive to be a place where they are sent out together into their neighbourhood, to come alongside what God is already doing: building relationships of peace and reconciliation.

Highlights:

- The synergy of working ecumenically generates the energy to create new expressions of being “church.”
- Support of church leaders is key to these initiatives.
- “Shared ministries” do not have to be congregational.



5. St. John's and St Paul's, Edmundston, NB

This UCC/ACC congregation is uniquely served by an Episcopalian minister from Maine. When the churches agreed to combine, the United Church building was sold and the more economical building, the Anglican church, became the host for the new congregation. They changed their name to represent both traditions. A devastating fire in 2014 gutted the church, which was the oldest building in Edmundston. The congregation pulled together and built a new building on the Anglican site.

The church alternates liturgies (Eucharist with wine every other week) and if a month has more than four Sundays the minister does something non-traditional. There are fifty members who support this full-time ministry. The make-up of the congregation is 1/3 United, 1/3 Anglican, and 1/3 Lutheran. It is the only English-speaking church in Edmundston, which is primarily a francophone community.

The church offers confirmation and baptism in the tradition of choice, and the church keeps two sets of membership books. It is governed by a leadership council which combines the responsibilities of the Anglican Vestry and the United Church Session. The nearest Anglican and United churches are over an hour away, making this a significant ministry for this area.

Highlights:

- This congregation highlights the importance of ministry leaders who are committed to a vision of ecumenical ministry to protect the sustainability of shared ministries, especially in vulnerable locations.
- Willingness to build a new shared identity is vital; one symbolic way is a name-change.
- The Lutheran presence represents the tendency of shared ministry congregations to attract and offer hospitality to members from beyond their sponsoring denominations.



6. Inner City Pastoral Ministry, Edmonton, AB

The Inner City Pastoral Ministry is an interdenominational Christian ministry of presence and worship that in partnership with the community walks with the people of the inner city of Edmonton. The ICPM has just recently (2018) celebrated its 40th Anniversary. Springing out of a long-standing United Church presence in inner city Edmonton (Bissell Centre) the ICPM was formed in 1978 to provide a more intentional spiritual dimension to the services that were being offered at the Bissell Centre. From the beginning the intent was to be ecumenical, offering worship that all could attend. Though established by the Edmonton Presbytery of the United Church of Canada, the first full time minister called to serve the ICPM in 1979 was the Rev. Barrett Scheske, a Lutheran minister. It was at that time that the Anglican and Lutheran Churches formally became supporting members of the ICPM. Currently, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese also supports the ICPM.

The focus is on a ministry of presence, social support, and worship. However, because the ICPM is not a formed congregation or parish, many of the challenges concerning styles of liturgy and sacraments are not present. An interesting feature of this ministry is that the service on every fourth Sunday, entitled Standing Stones, offers worship in a style that honours Indigenous perspectives. The leadership for the ICPM has been drawn over its history from the UCC, ACC, ELCIC, and the RC Archdiocese. It is also supported financially by these same groups.

A rotation of congregations supplies lunch every Sunday, including Christian Reformed, the Jewish Synagogue, and the Seventh Day Adventists. The Inner City Pastoral Ministry grew out of existing ecumenical relationships in the neighbourhood. Rick Chapman, the Anglican priest who has just retired as the full-time pastor at ICMP, notes, “We needed agreement in principles, but the judicatories left us to work out the details.”

Highlights:

- Ecumenical sharing in outreach ministry attracts engagement of others.
- The judicatories accept the risk of doing innovative new ministries.
- Financial fragility is common to many shared ministries but does not impede the vision.



7. Toronto Urban Native Ministry, Toronto, ON

On Sunday February 23rd, 2020, a service was held to celebrate and welcome the presence of Toronto Urban Native Ministry at Church of the Holy Trinity in downtown Toronto. The service highlighted the vitality and vision of this unique shared ministry. Leaders from both denominations participated and celebrated a shared ecumenical Eucharist. With singing, drumming, smudging, teaching, and sharing gifts, gratitude was expressed for ecumenical work that witnesses to how we are all to live into right relations with each other.

The Toronto Urban Native Ministry (TUNM) serves Indigenous people living in the Greater Toronto Area, supporting both Traditional Indigenous Spiritualities and worldviews as well as Christian Spiritual practices. Founded in 1996, TUNM now includes positions for a United Church minister, an Anglican priest, and a social and pastoral care worker with a focus on the needs of Indigenous women. The ministry reaches out to indigenous people on the street, in hospitals, in jails, shelters and hostels, providing counseling, Ceremony, spiritual care and referrals to community services. TUNM also provides services integrating traditional and Christian ways: wedding, baptisms, wakes, funerals, spirit naming, sweat lodge and fasting ceremonies. TUNM promotes principles of restoring right relations, building justice and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

TUNM affirms that human beings who are supported in a safe, caring, and respectful environment learn to value their lives and the lives of others, including plants and animals and other creations of the Great Spirit. This process creates a sense of identity and enriches the people's existence on Mother Earth. TUNM strives to support people and communities on their spiritual journeys.

Highlights:

- Focus on the needs of the community enables ministry to develop ecumenically.
- When we minister together, the witness is more compelling.
- The ACC and UCC have a shared national commitment to the TRC Calls to Action, and this ministry models a collaborative response to these Calls.



8. Windermere Valley Shared Ministry (WVSM), BC

On December 1, 1965 Christ Church Anglican and Trinity United Church, both of Invermere, BC, decided to merge on a six-month trial basis. The agreement permitted them to share a clergy salary and anticipated a national Anglican/United Church Union. Nationally, the union talks failed, but Christ Church and Trinity, along with several small rural points in the Windermere Valley, stayed together, each with their own building and liturgy. As early as the mid-1970s some parishioners described the shared ministry as incomplete, lacking a sense of unity and community.

But everything changed in the late 1990s, when the two Invermere church buildings were deemed too small. When asked, “Do we go our own ways, or do we build one new church together?” ninety percent of the membership voted to sell one building, demolish the other, and build a new church. Living together in one building changed the focus to a shared mission, and WVSM grew in both membership and unity. At the 50th anniversary of their “trial” union, the congregation of Christ Church Trinity could pray: “We acknowledge that there have been, and will continue to be, heartaches and struggles, yet we have travelled together with your love. Continue to guide and sustain us as we go forth following the way of Jesus.”

Highlights:

- The more the two congregations share, the stronger the partnership and the ministry may become.
- Building a new building together can make the transition to one church easier.
- Moving into a new building can be hard, but ultimately rewarding.



9. St. Michael's, Quebec City, QC

St. Michael's, a bilingual Anglican parish in Quebec City, was in a period of transition. No bilingual Anglican priests were available to serve the congregation on an interim basis, but a local bilingual United Church minister was. The United Church minister initially presided only at services of the word. However, the local Anglican bishop discovered a provision in the canons of the Church of England (B43 "Of ecumenical relations") allowing for clergy of other traditions to preside at celebrations of holy communion in Anglican churches if the clergy use their own denomination's liturgy and that this is clearly stated so that parishioners and visitors are aware of the tradition to which the liturgy and presiding minister belong.

Using that canon law as a guide, and after consultation with the congregation, the bishop authorized an adaptation of a United Church communion rite, and St. Michael's again had regular, bilingual eucharistic celebrations during this interim period. The parish is now served by an Anglican priest again, but that United Church minister continues to be a valued part of the congregation as an ecumenical honorary assistant pastor.

One learning from this situation is about the need for trust. Ecumenical cooperation often begins with friendship and collegiality. The United Church minister and Anglican bishop in this story attended seminary together and have remained friends and colleagues ever since, so he trusts her ability to lead liturgy and conscious of Anglican sensibilities.

Highlights:

- There is a need for trust built between the licensing bishop and the clergy in the shared ministry, which means trust in the theological and liturgical training, as well as the person's ability to be cooperative, adaptable, and to communicate needs and expectations clearly.
- This canonical provision from the Church of England has potential for application in other locations within the Canadian context.



10. Grandmothers' Tea, Six Nations, ON

Grandmothers' Tea began with a concern of some women that the wisdom and experience of the elders of the church, particularly women, were not being heard. Mardi Tindal, director of Five Oaks Education Centre at the time, heard the concerns, and recognizing the strength of eldership often found in Indigenous communities, brought several women together to share ideas that might meet their common needs. Women from Sydenham United Church and from New Credit United Church met at the Francis Sandy Theological Centre.

The Grandmothers' Tea was born, to encourage elders to share their experiences and wisdom and to promote knowledge and understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Misunderstanding and accusation were rife in the communities surrounding the Caledonia land occupation at the time, and here was a group of women (and occasionally men) who intentionally came together in the spirit of friendship and cooperation over a potluck lunch, sharing circle, and tea. It has grown to include over 100 women and about 20 hosting churches: United, Anglican, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, as well as women who are not church affiliated. Nations Uniting, a community ministry in Ohsweken, in the heart of Six Nations, now coordinates the circle.

The program is simple, led by the host community, following the model of a traditional sharing circle after a potluck lunch. Topics are varied but all contribute to increased understanding of one another's culture, past and present.

Highlights:

- The circle is a powerful means of sharing culture and promoting understanding and community and is a unique example of shared ministry.
- Responses to concerns identified by a community do not necessarily require church structures to flourish.

KEY THEMES IN CREATING AND SUSTAINING SHARED MINISTRIES

These ten examples are, as we have noted, just a few of the many ministries Anglican and United Church communities share together. Across Canada there are shared institutional chaplaincies in health care, universities and colleges, prison ministry, and the military. Most Anglican and United Church theological education occurs in ecumenical partnership arrangements. Many shared ministry congregations include three or more partners, especially the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Shared ministries have wonderful stories to tell.

Though each case is unique, some principles and lessons learned have emerged from the stories of ecumenical shared ministries in Canada. Here are the themes that we have identified as significant considerations for those wishing to pursue shared ministries.

1. Internal Relationships

A common thread in the stories above is the importance of relationship-building to the initiation, implementation, and sustainability of an ecumenical shared ministry. Strong relationships are rooted in a stance of mutual respect between communities, as well as a resolute commitment to working together across denominations.

A memorandum of understanding with a clear review process is fundamental to articulating the values, practices and accountabilities that will shape the way that relationships are lived out in the shared ministry. The MOU is a vital document for all involved from both the faith community and judicatory bodies. A carefully developed MOU represents commitment to covenants and accountabilities that care for the people to whom they relate.

Ecumenical shared ministries are often strengthened in the context of opportunities to embody and give voice to the relationships they represent. Early in the ministry, this may include public articulation and visual symbolism of entry into the covenant relationship. Facing hard decisions and risk, such as those around use of existing buildings or moving into a new building, can entail struggle but can ultimately be rewarding. Shared space, programming, and worship give visible witness to deepening relationships characterized by generosity, grace and respect for differences.

2. Judicatory Relationships

Healthy relationships between the judicatory bodies of each denomination are key to building vital and sustainable ecumenical shared ministries, as are healthy relationships between each judicatory and the ecumenical shared ministry itself.

Judicatory bodies in the Anglican Church will mean the bishop and diocesan council, and in the United Church the Regional Council ministry staff and/or Office of Vocation ministers. In both denominations there will also be other denominational clergy persons or bodies with oversight and collegial relationships involved in shared ministries processes.

It is essential that there be a robust collegial relationship between the relevant United Church Regional staff person and the Bishop of the relevant Diocese, as the support of both of these people is essential through every stage of the formation and the ongoing life of an ESM. Both need to have a strong commitment to ecumenical relationships and be able to build trust with their ecumenical counterpart. A good relationship between the judicatory leaders helps create the foundation and tone for a healthy ESM.

The judicatories need to accept the risk of doing innovative new ministries. What constitutes support from the judicatory will vary with the context. Some ESMs will need enthusiastic public affirmation but a “hands-off” management style for the shared ministry to grow organically out of the mission of the ESM. Some ESMs may not require church structures to flourish. Others will need visible and practical support from judicatories. Regardless, public recognition of the shared “episcopate” or oversight is important at the beginning of the covenant.

When trust is established, the local Anglican Bishop can find appropriate ways to license United Church ministers. For example, the canonical provision from the Church of England (B43 “Of ecumenical relations”) has potential for application in various locations within the Canadian context. As one of our vignettes illustrates, United Church diaconal ministers can serve in a shared ministry capacity, with cooperation and understanding from the local licensing bishop.

There is also a need for trust built between the judicatories and the clergy in the shared ministry; the bishop and the regional minister must have confidence in the clergy, in their theological and liturgical training, their ecumenical sensibilities and willingness to learn about the needs of each denomination, as well as the personal qualities of co-operation, adaptability, negotiation, and clear communication of needs and expectations.

3. Keys To Success

Covenants and Agreements

Developing a comprehensive covenant, memorandum of understanding, and/or joint owners' agreement is an essential foundation for shared ministry. A critical aspect of these documents is a clear mechanism for a review process — outlining such things as how often it should be reviewed and what is needed to make changes.

Identity

Another key element of success is the ability and willingness of the shared ministry to develop a shared identity that embraces and affirms both denominational traditions. Identity can grow as the shared ministry develops and the more that is shared over time, the stronger the partnership and the ministry may become. One way of developing a new and separate identity from the past is through a name change. The commitment to work together and develop together what this new entity and identity will be is essential for a successful endeavor. Strong ministry leadership (both clergy and lay leaders) who are committed to a vision of ecumenical ministry are critical to this endeavor.

Mission

One of the easier ways to share ministry together ecumenically is through program and mission. We can find much in common through shared mission and outreach, social justice and advocacy. Being rooted in place and building relationship with the neighbourhood promotes innovative and collective responses. Sometimes a group of community members from different denominations can develop a ministry that forms community and addresses a social concern, as we saw in the Grandmothers' Tea initiative. There are also examples of shared ministries that are non-congregational that flourish, including new expressions of church as we sort out how to be church in our present context, culture, and community.

Space

It is clear from the stories that sharing space makes for more sustainable congregations. The reduced cost for property and utilities can be a great benefit to congregations who are struggling with the challenges of maintaining a building. Shared ministry can release us from being tied to our buildings. Financial fragility can still be common to many shared ministries, but it does not impede the vision — the passion and openness to the shared ministry becomes more of a driving force than worrying about finances. Choosing to build or move into a new space together can make the transition to one church easier. While any kind of transition like this can be hard, it is ultimately rewarding.

4. Conclusions

Ecumenical collaboration generates the energy and enthusiasm essential for supporting new ministry initiatives. Ecumenical ministries have a more compelling witness; as they point to, and in a tangible way embody, our fundamental unity in Christ. Often the possibilities created by the hospitality and openness to others, which is critical to shared ministries, is attractive to those beyond the original founding denominations, further amplifying the positive outcomes for the community within which the ministry is located. In some cases, shared ministries have attracted the engagement of those who do not have an affiliation with any faith group.

In certain situations, some form of shared ministry is essential to the survival of ministry in that location. Viewed more positively, a strong commitment to ecumenical sharing provides opportunities for new and enriched ministries. The locus for shared ministries is not, however, exclusively the congregational context. Several powerful ministries have been developed that are unlikely to have come to fruition or maturity if they had not been ecumenical. One area that deserves focused consideration is the synergy that is created through ecumenical responses to the TRC Calls to Action.

There is no doubt that entering into shared ministry involves risk. Yet the Gospel is of course, about the risk, the dare, that Jesus offers us. Yet it need not be a fearful risk. Living in denominational silos is only available to those with the wealth and power to create them. The Lund Principle suggests the opposite: that churches should act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately. Shared ministries can begin anywhere: share whatever you can. Those who engage in shared ministries note that generosity, grace, and respect for differences make the experience joyous.

C
FURTHER RESOURCES
FOR SHARED MINISTRIES

The Ecumenical Shared Ministries Handbook

(<https://www.anglican.ca/resources/ecumenical-shared-ministries-handbook/>)

Daring to Share: Interdenominational Congregations in the United States and Canada, by Sandra Beardsall, Mitzi J. Budde, and William McDonald