



Life and Mission Agency: Agence Vie et Mission

SUGGESTED PROCESS FOR CREATING A MULTI-POINT CHARGE

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For the past several decades our denominational norm for congregational ministry has been one full-time minister serving in a single congregation.¹ However, changing circumstances may lead congregations to consider shared ministry arrangements.² Perhaps the most common of these shared ministry arrangements is the multi-point charge. In this configuration two or more congregations share a single full-time minister in a formal arrangement which links the congregations together as a single entity called a “pastoral charge.” It should be noted that a multi-point charge is *not* the same as an amalgamation. In an amalgamation, two or more congregations blend into a single congregation meeting in a single location. This often results in the sale of no-longer-used church buildings. In a multi-point charge, two or more congregations continue as separate congregations with their own separate buildings but sharing a single minister.

Multi-point charges can arise for a variety of reasons, sometimes historic, sometimes having to do with geography or population. Perhaps the most common reason is financial.³ Consider this scenario: a congregation decides after its minister leaves that it can no longer call a full-time minister. Another nearby congregation (or congregations) makes the same decision. Informal conversations take place between interim moderators and elders and members suggesting openness to explore entering into a multi-point charge arrangement. What happens next? How

¹ In the earliest years of our history multi-point charges were the norm, with several of our early ministers travelling great distances to serve many churches.

² Types of Shared Ministry Arrangements:

- Separate part-time call where a single minister serves two or more separate autonomous congregations
- Cluster ministry where two or more congregations share two or more ministry staff persons
- Two or more congregations served by a presbytery-level regional staff person such as a General Presbyter
- Ecumenical Shared Ministry where the congregation enters into a formal shared ministry agreement with another congregation from an ecumenical partner denomination (The Anglican Church of Canada, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, or The United Church of Canada).

³ Financial considerations may not be the only reason for congregations to consider other ministry arrangements. Some congregations may have, as part of their visioning process, made an intentional decision to move to a multi-point charge, or a cluster ministry, or a part-time ministry, as a way to free up and reallocate financial resources for specific outreach projects and to encourage gifted lay leaders to work with the minister as a team to develop and implement their mission goals.

could such an arrangement be set up? What steps would have to be taken to create a multi-point charge?

First, it is important to remember that in our polity presbyteries have the authority to “unite or disjoin congregations in pastoral charges” (Book of Forms 200.9). Any decision to create a new multi-point charge would be made by presbyteries based on a proposal developed by the congregations following these suggested steps:

- Call a meeting of each session of the interested congregations to determine if each session is interested in exploring the formation of a multiple-point charge.
- Call a joint meeting of the sessions to begin the formal conversation about what the multi-point charge would look like. Discuss the issues in the checklist below to determine if any might present difficulties great enough to discontinue the process.
- Create a joint committee of consisting of three members from each congregation (including at least one elder from each congregation) to develop a memorandum of understanding which sets out the detailed specifics of the proposed multi-point charge arrangement. Submit the proposed memorandum of understanding to each session for consideration and approval.
- Keep the congregations in the loop. Communicate regularly about the status of the conversation. Hold congregational meetings to answer any questions or address any concerns about the proposed memorandum of understanding, and to have the final proposed memorandum of understanding approved by each participating congregation.
- Once the sessions and congregations have approved the memorandum of understanding, submit it to the presbytery along with a petition (Book of Forms 71-79) requesting that the presbytery join the congregations in a single multi-point pastoral charge.

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

Worship

- How far would the minister have to travel between the congregations on a Sunday morning to lead worship? How might winter weather affect the travel time?

- Would there have to be a change in service times to accommodate the minister's travel on Sundays? What times would the services start? Who would have the earlier service, and who would have the later service?
- Would the congregations be open to more creative arrangements for worship? Might they consider holding joint services in one building one week and another building the next week; or a similar arrangement in alternate months, or every six months? If the congregations use technology for online services, might they consider a "satellite service" arrangement where the minister leads worship live in one location and remotely in one or more other locations?
- Are there any special services during the year for which the other congregation(s) may be asked to accommodate? What will be done on Christmas Eve? Holy Week? Easter?
- What would happen during the summer months when the minister is on vacation? Separate or joint services with pulpit supply?

Stipend and Allowances

- How would the shared costs of ministry be divided between the churches? Equally? Some other ratio based on the relative sizes or resources of the congregations?
- How would the shared costs be handled? Would there be multiple cheques issued for the minister's stipend? How would other items like the group insurance plan payments be handled? Would one treasurer pay the full cost on behalf of the pastoral charge and submit a statement to the other treasurer(s) for reimbursement for their portion of the shared costs?

Other

- What are the expectations for the minister's office hours?
- When would session meetings be held? When would meetings of the board of managers be held?
- When would the annual congregational meetings be held?

- How would midweek groups or other special events where the minister's involvement is expected (e.g., Bible study group, summer Vacation Bible School) be managed?
- The move to a multi-point charge will mean the minister cannot provide full-time ministry and availability to all congregations. Can the congregations temper their expectations under the new arrangement? Will some activities normally led by the minister need to be cancelled or will they be led by laypeople?
- Do the congregations see any possibilities for joint ministry projects or initiatives where members of the congregations could worship, learn, and work together?

SAMPLE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

The memorandum of understanding below was used for the creation of a two-point charge.

PROPOSED MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN [name1] PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AND [name2] PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A "Two-Point Charge Coordination Committee", which is a joint committee of representatives from the [name1] and [name2] Sessions, have been meeting together with the intention of addressing the logistical details of the movement towards a two-point charge. This Committee is committed to continuing to meet after the transition with the intention of addressing and resolving any issues that may arise.

OPERATIONS

- The Congregations will divide the shared costs for ministry on an equal basis (50-50).⁴
- The Treasurer at [name1] will continue to administer payroll, benefits etc. and invoice [name2] monthly for their share
- Each Congregation will continue to administer their own additional expenses for caretakers, music directors, building maintenance etc.
- The Minister will maintain semi-regular office hours at [name1] and be available as needed for visitations, meetings and pastoral care for both congregations. The Minister will be accessible via voicemail and email.

⁴ Where one of the congregations has a manse, the housing costs (e.g., utilities, insurance, maintenance and repairs) are shared in the same proportion as the other ministry costs.

- The Minister's preferred day off will be [weekday].
- The Minister will select 5 weeks vacation, regular services will be maintained, and the Minister will arrange for guest preachers during these vacancies
- On a regular Sunday [name1] services will start at 9:30 am and [name2] services at 11 am
- The Congregations will continue to hold separate Session meetings: at the present time, [name1] holds its Session meetings on the 3rd Wednesday of every month September through June; the Session at [name2] will select a standing monthly date in discussion with the Minister
- A semi-annual meeting of the "Two Point Charge Coordination Committee" will be held to evaluate the working relationship and address any challenges and report their findings to each session.

SPECIAL SERVICES & EVENTS

The following services are regularly held and will be continued.

- Longest Night Service – 7:30pm Dec 21, [name1] joint service
- Christmas Eve – separate services, Minister leads one service, congregation or guest speaker leads other, rotate annually
- New Year's Eve – 7pm, [name2] joint service
- Maundy Thursday – 7:30pm, joint service at [name1]
- Good Friday – joint AM service rotating between [name1]
- Easter Sunday
 - 8:00am joint sunrise service
 - 9:00am regular service at [name1]
 - 9am-11am breakfast at [name2] (Minister unable to participate)
 - 11am regular service at [name2]
- Four times a year the Worship Team at [name1] meets after the Sunday service, the meeting time for this will need to be adjusted
- All fellowship events, Bible studies, fundraising events etc. will be cross-promoted to both congregations. For example:
 - Bible Study Group ([name1]), Mondays at 10am
 - Faith and Film Night ([name1])
 - Spring, Fall and Christmas Sales ([name1] & [name2])
 - Robbie Burns evening ([name1])
 - Fund raising concerts ([name1] & [name2])
 - Potluck Dinners ([name1] & [name2])

- Annual Picnics ([name1] & [name2])
- Vacation Bible School ([name2])

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