

Mutual Ministry in the Church TCP 1/29/13

Concepts of Mutual Ministry:

- ❖ Business and other organizations have rigid systems for both establishing values and getting things done (based on top-down structure and staff that adheres to management decision making).
- ❖ Churches, on the other hand, are volunteer organizations. The “top” changes regularly: clergy come and go, the vestry at least rotates or changes each year. The ministry of the church is sustained by the whole congregation.
- ❖ The whole congregation (both leaders and parishioners) establishes the level of vitality and the kind of ministry and relationships that characterize a parish. People who are attracted to that kind of parish join up, and perpetuate that kind of organization.
- ❖ Significant change, then, attracts different newcomers and sustains that change into a new generation. But the change won’t happen top-down. Only the whole congregation can implement changes or sustain ministry. But the whole congregation needs leaders, both lay and ordained in order to be faithful and successful in ministry.

Mutual Ministry is a concept that recognizes how every member of the church is important in the ministry of the whole congregation. This comes from Biblical principles, especially Paul’s First letter to the Corinthians. Paul calls the Christians in Corinth the “Body of Christ,” and says that each person is like a body part—that’s what “member” originally meant. Each body part is important to the whole body, and the whole body can’t function well if even only one body part doesn’t function well.

On one level, each of us have gifts to offer to the whole community, and like a team with different talents, each can work together for the success of the whole team. *On another level*, we are called to be in Christian relationship with each other, and we can’t simply cut off another person because they aren’t performing the way we expect.

Our relationships and commitment (with God and with each other in Christ) are the foundations of Mutual Ministry.

Practical Implications

Can the priest do all the parish ministry alone? Vestry alone? Congregation without priest or vestry? What happens when one person is discarded or left out? What happens when we allow conflict to harbor resentment? What happens when we talk about others or about disagreements at coffee hour (without talking directly to the other person)?

So, knowing the importance of everyone in ministry, and the importance of leadership roles, Mutual Ministry is the basis for setting and maintaining mutual expectations (both written in Canons, by-laws and position descriptions, and implicit in our interpersonal expectations).

Mutual Ministry is also the basis for setting the vision ahead, and the goals required to reach it.

How do we support mutual ministry? Mutual Expectations and Mutual Accountability.

Roles in the church:

- Rector (and staff)
- Warden & Vestry
- Congregation (including ministry leaders)

Expectations:

Bible & Book of Common Prayer, Canons, By-laws, Letters of Agreement, Position Descriptions, and General Expectations

The Bible is the rule of life and faith for Christians. **The Book of Common Prayer** is the primary expression of the theology and worship of the Episcopal Church, and sets the basics and boundaries on liturgy and teaching.

Canons: National Church and Diocesan Canons establish the way many decisions are made and the responsibilities and authority of various roles in the church. Where the canons are silent, local documents such as By-Laws and position descriptions fill-in. Canons are made and amended by General Convention (National Canons) or the Diocesan Convention (clergy and lay representatives go each year).

- Canonical responsibilities of the Rector
- Canonical responsibilities of the Warden & Vestry
- Canonical responsibilities of the congregation

By-Laws: created and amended at the parish level, under the canons, they define how leaders are selected, and the particular way those roles are involved in ministry and decision making. Read and understand your By-Laws

- By-Laws responsibilities of the Rector
- By-Laws responsibilities of the Warden & Vestry
- By-Laws responsibilities of the congregation

Letters of Agreement and Position Descriptions establish the basics of how the parish relates to the Rector and other staff. Position Descriptions can also be established to clarify the roles of ministry leaders and how they relate to the Rector and Vestry. Strategic Plans set the direction of the whole parish over a strategic period (often five years), and may include expectations for ministries and their leaders.

- Agreement and Position Description expectations of the Rector & staff
- Ministry Description expectations of the Warden and Vestry
- Ministry Description expectations of Ministry Leaders or Congregation

Implicit expectations are those unspoken convictions that may or may not be shared by others as to the appropriate role for others involved in Mutual Ministry. The Congregation may expect that the Rector will always cook the hot dogs at the annual barbeque, or always be available on Thursday nights for counseling. The Rector may expect everyone not to call on his or her day off—or perhaps the expectation is that they always call on the day off if there is a question. These expectations can be reasonable (the rector should always dress in clean clothes) or unreasonable (the Senior Warden should always give a minimum of \$10,000 annually to the church). But if they are unspoken, and never discussed, they can lead to miscommunication, confusion, resentment, distrust and a breakdown in effectiveness for mutual ministry. One role of Mutual Ministry Review is to foster regular, comfortable and open discussions about these expectations, so that they can be appropriately negotiated mutually between parties.

Mutual Ministry Review:

Mutual Ministry Review is a process by which we take stock of all these expectations, and ask:

Expectations:

- How well are we fulfilling our expectations of one another?
- Are we doing our ministry *as Christians* (with the love, grace, forgiveness and commitment to God and each other that God calls us to), and
- How effective are we in this ministry?

Goals: Specifically, we can set goals together in response to our mission & vision, and then ask:

- Did we achieve our goals (for priest, vestry, parish)?
- What helped us to achieve these goals?
- What hindered achieving the ones we missed?
- What might help us further achieve our goals in the future?
- Where is God calling us next? What new goals should we set?

Keep in mind “SMART” Goals:

Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Related to the Mission
Time based

Note that MUTUAL Ministry Review involves the review of everyone as individuals and as a team. Reviewing just the rector (or reviewing the rector when the rector is not present) is NOT Mutual, and can be a destructive process. Better to say what needs to be said face to face.

Often times, an outside facilitator can help keep these conversations faithful and fruitful for everyone involved. Contact Church House for referrals of good facilitators.

Do Mutual Ministry Reviews regularly and not just when a conflict presents itself.