

Ministry and Personnel Committees: Developing and Maintaining Healthy Teams



The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada

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About This Resource: This is a companion to Ministry and Personnel Committee: Policy, Procedures, and Practices. All resources are available on the [Ministry and Personnel Committee Resources page](#) on the United Church website.

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Developing and Maintaining Healthy Teams

As described in the [Ministry and Personnel Committee: Policies, Procedures, Practices](#), multiple staff ministries are those in which two or more individuals are called or appointed to a community of faith. But even in situations where there is only one ministry personnel employed by the community of faith, there could be other lay employees who work with ministry personnel to form a staff team. As the M&P Committee oversees the relationships in the team and offers support to the staff team, it can be important for the committee to be aware of stages of team development, and to be intentional about building and tending the staff team.

Gratitude to the members of the Women in Ministry Committee and their development of *How Will We Team? Making the Most of Multiple Staff Ministry* (2003), which is the source of much of the material in this resource.

While there are advantages and disadvantages to different models of ministry teams, whether the ministry team is based on either a hierarchical or an egalitarian model of teaming, the team members must:

1. agree to the team model;
2. follow the team model that has been agreed on; and
3. be engaged as equal contributors in ways appropriate to the team model.

It is essential that all team members are treated fairly, justly, and equitably and have the opportunity to share their gifts in tangible, visible ways that are recognized and appreciated. The committee should be alert to power imbalances among ministry personnel, between ministry personnel and lay employees, or between staff and volunteer leadership due to

- ordained/diaconal/lay status
- full-time/part-time employment
- gender identity and members' responses to gender issues
- sexual orientation
- tenure, or age and experience
- salary and benefits; office space
- theological diversity
- cultural diversity

Teaming is not for the faint of heart. It takes a lot of energy to build trust, to get to know one another, and to let go of any individualistic tendencies—especially egocentric needs for attention and recognition. A team begins with knowing and trusting oneself and one's gifts, and

above all knowing oneself as beloved of God. There is then an openness to recognize that the same is true for all team members.

It takes time to grow a team. Getting to know one another, talking about what is important (theological foundations, styles of working, personalities, hopes, and visions of ministry), doing things together, planning, working, playing, and emotional sharing all play a part in team growth. There is the added dimension of sharing faith, the practice of living a theology of church and of leadership—a commitment to a ministry of inclusivity, compassion, and justice making. There also needs to be time for laughter and lightness, and the recognition that each person is a “work in progress.”

The hope of these team ministry resources is not to set up a rigid set of rules, but to provide best practices for the team to establish guidelines that the team agrees on, feels comfortable with, can trust, and enables each person to give of their gifts of ministry.

Stages of Team Development

Every team, like every group, experiences predictable stages in its development. Knowing what these are can help each team member

- be more conscious about probable team issues;
- realize that the stages are normal and therefore manageable; and
- be more intentional about how to move through the stages.

Stage One: Testing (Forming, Inclusion)

At this beginning stage of a team relationship, the big question is one of belonging and acceptance. Will there be a place for each individual here?

Words to describe this stage include: politeness, impersonal (keeping the other at arm's length), being watchful, and guarded.

During this stage, it is critical to begin building trust by getting to know one another in social gatherings, by informal conversation and storytelling, by beginning conversation about understandings of ministry and leadership, and by getting to know one another personally and professionally. Some of this can be done in a structured way, perhaps at a team-building workshop, or with a third party, or by following a set of “guide questions” designed for this purpose. This is a time to get a sense of common understandings about ministry and issues of diversity and difference in theology, leadership, and ways of working.

Stage Two: Infighting (Storming, Control)

Words used to describe this phase include: controlling conflicts and/or people, opting out, difficulties, feeling stuck.

Diversities and differences are apparent in this phase, and this is natural and normal. If building trust at stage one has been thorough and continues to be part of both formal and informal team meetings, there will be a core of trust to help move the team members through this stage where a team is deciding how to share the work, how to be mutually accountable, and how it will make decisions. It is critical for each member to be up front and open with the others to reduce any feelings that there is a contest or competition for territory or of one member deferring to the other. When such issues as difference, power, exclusion, and inclusion arise, success in dealing with them depends in large measure on whether the team is continuing to pay attention to the forming stage issues.

Stage Three: Getting Organized (Establishing Norms)

Some words and phrases that describe this phase include: developing skills, establishing procedures, giving and receiving feedback, and confronting issues.

At this stage, team members get into the work as they establish ways of doing things according to agreed norms. Trust allows for giving and receiving honest, direct feedback, and for dealing with whatever issues present themselves from within or outside the team. There is a growing appreciation of unique talents. A cohesiveness develops with a sense of pulling together as a team.

Stage Four: Mature Closeness (Performing, Having a Common Mission)

Key descriptions for this stage might include: resourceful, flexible, open, effective, close, supportive, fun, affording satisfaction, affording enjoyment, creative.

The greater the ease of working together, the more creative energy there is to go around, with a growing affection and appreciation for the strength of the team and each individual. There is an increasing sense of accomplishment, interdependence, and beyond that, a sense that the team is living out its ministry in this place and is capable of far more than any solo ministry could be.

Building a Ministry Team

While the M&P Committee is not involved in calling or appointing ministry personnel, there are important questions to discuss as a community of faith builds a team ministry. It is important to discuss the expectations of the team and its roles and responsibilities.

- What model of teaming will be used (hierarchical or egalitarian)? How will roles be determined?
- How do the strengths and gifts each person brings get worked out according to the job description?
- If there are parts of ministry about which each feels passionate, or ill equipped to take on, or not interested in doing, how will that get sorted out in a manner that is fair and just?
- If ministry positions are seen as equal, what will the M&P Committee and the governing body do to assist the community of faith (and other staff) to understand the intention of shared ministry? Is the same formula used to determine salary paid to each team member?
- In the area of continuing education allowance, is there fair treatment for all ministry personnel staff?
- Is there fair access to support staff for each team member?

Office space can be an obvious symbol of equity or hierarchy, so there are important questions to ask. Where are the offices located (in relation to each other and in terms of accessibility)? How accessible are they to the public? Is the space adequate and appropriate for the job description? In terms of size, furnishings and windows for an equal team, is one office obviously “second-class”?

No matter what model of ministry applies, each ministerial staff member needs clear, comfortable, adequate, safe, accessible, and well-lit space. Creative solutions may be needed to handle this issue.

When the team begins working together, the key factor in enabling a good start is to take time for uninterrupted conversation in a neutral space, like going on a retreat, possibly with an outside facilitator.

Enabling a Good Start

The following process will help team members to begin working together to build a shared vision of ministry.

1. Individually take time to think about and record your hopes and visions for the team, as it relates to ministry in this community of faith and the wider church. (This could be done by list making, mind-mapping, or creating a collage with pictures, words, or symbols that symbolize teaming.) It is important to identify what is important to you and what you might bring to a team.
2. Share your notes or pictures with each other. Talk about similarities and differences. Which differences need to be resolved, and how are those differences a reflection of the diversity of gifts and therefore strengths for the team? Take time to reflect on the combined lists/images and what the combination says about the possibilities for and

priorities of your team. How might you appreciate and work with the similarities and differences that make up the whole picture?

3. Discuss what action to take on these hopes and visions. How might the team continue to build on this?
4. From whom will the team get support in fulfilling these hopes and visions? With whom do they need to be shared? The M&P Committee? The governing body of the pastoral charge? How will the team members do that?

When you have determined your visions and action steps required, the following questions will suggest possible criteria for sharing the work:

- How can you live and work creatively with the job descriptions?
- Who wants to develop skills in particular areas?
- What experience does each team member have in the various leadership roles and tasks? You may decide to share a number of roles and responsibilities within the parameters of the job descriptions to which you have agreed, and to occasionally trade jobs to become acquainted with one another's areas. If there are areas of significant overlap (e.g., leading worship, providing pastoral care, Christian education, or social justice ministry), the team, plus the M&P Committee, will need to work out how this can happen in a fair and satisfying way that allows both the development of skills and the sharing of gifts and strengths.
- What are the implications of each of the above criteria for
 - the team as a whole?
 - individual team members?
 - how the community of faith will perceive the team?

Then, as a team, discuss the following possible situations:

- If one team member is more skilled or has much more experience in one area, they may get more requests for leadership in that area.
 - How will that sit with the other team members?
 - How will you allow for the practice and development of skills of each team member?
 - What will your team do if, for example, one of you receives most of the requests for pastoral care even though you have agreed to share that responsibility? If one team member is being deferred to, they need to clarify the agreed-upon team practice.
- Given that each team member may have a different status as ministerial staff (congregational designated minister, ordained minister, designated lay minister, diaconal minister) what bearing will this have on roles each takes on? What are the implications of one team member using a title if the others do not?
- How will team members support each other privately and within the community of faith and wider church? Similarly, the community of faith, through its M&P Committee, needs to offer support to its team.

- Are some roles, such as preaching and worship leadership, ascribed more recognition and power than others, such as pastoral care visiting? Often it is the ministerial staff who does more upfront leadership that receives the most recognition. How will each staff member address this, and what provisions will the community of faith make to recognize the importance and value of all ministry personnel?
- How will concerns about roles and workload be raised? For example, one team member might feel as if they are doing more work. Or team members might have very different working and learning styles, and keep different hours for planning and preparation of the work.

With all of these issues, it is very important to assess which issues are personal (belonging to the team) and which are organizational or structural (belonging to the community of faith or wider church) and to address them appropriately.

Agreements regarding roles and responsibilities should be recorded. It is important to communicate the titles each will use to the community of faith.

If there is a change in the team's working relationships, the decision regarding that change needs to be made jointly (ministry staff, M&P Committee, the governing body of the community of faith, and possibly the appropriate regional council committee).

Sharing Power in Teams

Power is defined as the ability to be involved in ways that influence and make a difference, and the awareness of power is central to effective ministry. How team members claim and exercise their power in appropriate ways is a key question. Sharing power is a practice and, as a practice, there will be times of slipping into old patterns that need to be transformed. Members of the team can model shared power, by advocating for one another, as well as truly listening to and taking seriously what is shared with team members.

Information is also a form of power. How will this power be shared with other team members? How will your team decide what information needs to be shared immediately and what can wait until the weekly team meeting?

More Team Ministry Best Practices

There are further ways to be proactive regarding team ministry.

- Ensure all team members are visible and sharing leadership roles in worship, Christian education, committees, and other situations, such as group study leadership, reports to the governing body, and social media.
- At the public covenanting service, "team" may be used as the theme.
- Encourage the community of faith to develop a process to encourage team ministry.

In the area of mutual support and accountability, some best practices include the following:

- If someone in the community of faith complains about another team member, it is imperative not to be the “go-between.” It is important to ask the person to give feedback directly to the team member concerned.
- The chair of a committee consistently calls one staff member rather than the team member whose responsibility it is to relate to that committee. The team member being called needs to refer the caller to the appropriate team member.
- The team agrees to alternate responsibility for conducting funerals, yet one team member is often the one asked for. The member called needs to raise this in team meetings, discuss it with the M&P Committee, and perhaps also the governing body to review and confirm the agreed upon policy. This is a very sensitive issue. Perhaps one way of managing it would be for both ministerial staff to share in funeral liturgies so that the community of faith becomes comfortable with both leaders.
- It is not always the responsibility of the team member who is “left out” to push their way in. The team member who is included needs to take action by stepping aside and making appropriate referrals to include the other team member. They need to be firm and clear about the team’s visions and decisions and not cave in to pressure or differing expectations.

Criteria for Healthy, Effective Teams

The following criteria are ways to further evaluate team health:

1. Team members understand and agree on goals and objectives (e.g., there is agreement on the goal of developing strong, inclusive lay leadership and on the ways to accomplish that goal).
2. Team members’ resources (strengths, abilities, specialties) are recognized, appreciated, and shared in the community of faith and beyond.
3. There is a high level of trust among team members. Conflict is dealt with openly and worked through (no shoving stuff under the mat and then complaining to others); it is okay to disagree openly with each other, but not to embarrass teammates.
4. There is full participation in leadership. How leadership roles are shared by team members are worked out together, or possibly in consultation with the M&P Committee or a consultant.
5. Effective procedures guide team functioning. Team members support these procedures and act accordingly (e.g., if a team member is asked about a matter that is the other team member’s responsibility, they will direct the inquiry to the team member in charge instead of dealing with it themselves). This example reflects the appropriate use of power.
6. Communication among team members is open and participatory. Ideas are expressed fully and openly to minimize hidden agendas.

7. Approaches to problem solving and decision-making are well established and mutually agreed upon.
8. The team tries different ways of doing things and is creative in its approach to work, its problems, and its challenges. For example:
 - During a worship service, a team could illustrate how it works together by using pantomime or a slide presentation, rather than by talking about teaming.
 - Team members decide to take turns responding to phone calls two mornings each per week rather than each being available during all office hours.
 - Occasionally, team members exchange places/roles, such as when preaching and leading worship, visiting the Sunday school or youth group, or attending finance committee meetings.
9. The team regularly evaluates how it functions (e.g., the team devotes a short portion of regular team meetings to this topic and includes a twice-yearly reflection and planning time or retreat).
10. The team pays attention to the content of its tasks and to the well-being of the team and its members. It might be useful to think in terms of the “tricycle model” of group maintenance: one wheel represents care and support of the individual, one wheel represents care and support of the team, and the front wheel represents doing the tasks and leadership of ministry. All wheels have to be in good shape for the tricycle (or team) to move smoothly and effectively.
11. The team reviews past experiences, learns from them, and uses those learnings to plan appropriate actions for the future (e.g., a team learns that doing a dialogue sermon without a specific structure takes longer than the intended 15 minutes; therefore, if another dialogue sermon is scheduled, there will be more structured planning and practice).

Building Team Support Systems

Ways to create support for your ministry team might include the following:

1. Negotiate with another team or teams to hold occasional joint meetings to learn how other teams manage issues of common concern, both within the team itself and in relation to the community of faith, and how they support one another. Different individuals might facilitate different parts of an agreed-upon agenda, and/or a consultant might be invited to facilitate.
2. Ask a consultant to work with the team to evaluate team progress and to raise particular issues that may be difficult to do within the team itself, particularly if there are some issues of difference that have not been reconciled. The consultant might also help the team set goals and objectives.

3. The M&P Committee should meet regularly with the team and its individual members. The meeting could be structured so that half the committee meets with each team member for part of the time, and the rest of the time is spent with the entire team and committee together. This gives each individual time with committee members to focus on particular issues, which can then be summarized with the entire group or be dealt with in other appropriate ways.

A helpful resource for developing and maintaining healthy ministry teams is the “Nurturing Church Staff Teams” course on [ChurchX](#), the United Church’s online learning platform.
