

Clustering for Creativity

When Jesus said, “Love one another as I have loved you,” he was speaking to all of his disciples, in light of their commission to carry forward his message and his work as the Church. As ideals, Church unity and collegiality are laudable; as practices, they are often difficult to establish. This is a recommendation for our new Presbyteries which attempts to take into account our need for unity and collegiality while acknowledging the following realities:

- We need to decrease the sense of isolation that clergy and laity alike often feel, whether in rural or urban situations
- We need to deepen relationships within our new, larger Presbyteries
- We need more people trained and experienced in routine Presbytery functions such as assisting with Discernment Committees, Joint Needs Assessment Committees, Joint Search Committees, Pastoral Oversight Visits, and Pastoral Charge Supervision
- We need to work efficiently, reducing the human, financial, and environmental costs of travel
- We can benefit from the work of those specially trained and gifted for certain tasks

This proposal is simple.

1. The four new Presbyteries, in organizing themselves for the work ahead, should gather their pastoral charges and mission units into “families” of five or six, with attention to considerations of geography, sense of mission, and common concerns.
2. It should become the stated policy of the four new Presbyteries that, in the case of any pastoral charge or mission unit requiring the provision of routine Presbytery functions (such as those mentioned above), Presbytery representatives would *ordinarily* be drawn from within the cluster of pastoral charges and mission units being served.”
3. Appointments to these functions would remain the duty of the Committee, Commission, or Team responsible for overseeing the actual work, which would retain the authority to appoint Presbytery representatives from beyond the “family,” to make allowances for difficult, sensitive, or otherwise specialized cases to be handled by carefully selected individuals.

It needs to be understood that most Presbyters will regularly be called upon to offer the routine service of Presbytery within their respective “families” of charges and mission units. These “families” would not have any ongoing, formal administrative obligations or decision-making authority, but serve as a “small group” of ministers and ministries.

However, such working relationships could well lead to informal gatherings and helpful conversations. It isn’t hard to imagine circumstances in which this heightened sense of mutuality could be fruitful, from collegial support among ministry staff to the launching of new ministries, having specialized staff, the sponsoring of new outreach efforts, and other cooperative ventures.

As with any family, some relationships may be easier than others. However, if clustering in families as outlined above helps reduce the sense of isolation that both ministry personnel and pastoral charges and mission units, and lessens the often-felt antipathy between the “us” and “them” of the local congregation as it relates to Presbytery, it can only help us to be more creative in the years ahead, and live into the reality of *ut omnes unum sint* as disciples of the risen Christ.