

What might some advantages of co-ministry be for your congregation?

Many clergy couples feel that by working together as a collaborative clergy team, they offer a model of shared leadership that demonstrates equality of the sexes, as well as a healthy coalition between colleagues and marriage partners.

Some of the advantages of co-ministry include:

- a diversity of styles;
- variety of sermon styles & topics;
- complementary strengths & opinions;
- collaborative style working together for the laity;
- two choices for counseling & gender preference allowed;
- enhanced consensus building atmosphere; availability of ministerial services is increased;
- more variety, freshness & depth in Sunday services because each has more time between Sundays "on" to refresh & prepare.

Some additional benefits include:

- Each can attend separate committees;
- Board and committees get extra ideas and energy;
- Experience, training and skills of two people;
- More comprehensive, effective and creative liaisoning with various areas of church programs;
- Duo services --two different points of view on a variety of topics;
- Division of various duties depending on skills, constraints --can attend committee meetings, teach Adult RE, etc., depending on particular gifts.
- Modeling healthy conflict management and sharing of ideas

How would you divide the work?

“Co-Ministry” is two married ministers sharing one position. Clergy couples work together as equal colleagues, but many also think it's important to have certain areas of clear, primary responsibility, as well as areas where clergy couples share jointly. Final decisions about who does what will be made in consultation with the congregational leadership and is revisited and revised from time to time as the church's needs change and skills and interests develop. Co-Ministers share everything, including confidences. Generally, most clergy teams meet together with the Worship Committee, the Board of Trustees/Standing Committee, the Committee on Ministry, the Social Justice Council, the Program Council, the Pastoral Care Team. In meetings where both are present, often one facilitates while the other serves as a ‘process observer,’ providing needful insights into systemic issues.

How about other ministerial responsibilities?

Each clergy couple structures their responsibilities differently. This quote was taken from a recent clergy couple's packet, to give you an idea of how one couple structured their work. This couple was being paid for one full-time parish ministry position.

“In worship, we would divide the year's preaching equally between us. Approximately once a month we would either serve as each other's liturgist, or do a joint sermon. One Sunday a month we would expect to have off together. We would also work with the worship associates and lay leaders that were charged with the responsibility of developing the service. Both of us would teach, counsel and make pastoral calls. Whenever possible, we would both attend social events and fund-raisers together. We would take the same day off, and would expect to take sabbatical time together as well.”

Often, search committees want to know how to develop ground rules for the ministers and for the congregation for a successful co-ministry. Here are some suggestions from other Search Committees and/or Committees on Ministry.

- “The Letter of Agreement should describe areas such as how time allocation is decided; how people decide whom to approach for counseling, weddings, memorials, etc. “
- “It should be clearly spelled out what happens if one of the minister's leaves the co-ministry. Most agreements indicate that the co-ministry is over if that happens.”
- “Our Search committee was very thorough: verbally & in writing, in explaining co-ministry to congregation before decision was made. The Search Committee then became the first Committee on Ministry to help with the transition period.”
- Clear recognition of a shared one-person position, and gratitude for the extra (60 hours plus) you get and abundant and committed dialogue.

Cost. Every search committee wants to know about the cost. Would they be different from a single parish minister's position? Here are a few responses from other churches:

- “Only extra expenses (travel, etc.), contributions to pension, etc. was not significant problem. Increased benefits: disability, life insurance, professional, dues, conference, travel”
- “People need to understand that they'll have to pay more to get more”
- “Professional expenses could be higher than a single minister's would be.”

How would you handle the salary and housing payment?

Again, each clergy couple's situation is unique. Some couples prefer to be paid separately, others prefer receiving one check. This is usually negotiated during the candidating process.

What concerns may arise with Co-Ministers?

- “Communication issues: people who think that they tell one minister, they've told the other; if both need to know something, both need to be told--each minister does not discuss matters regarding the other's area of concern.”
- “With so much information that comes to ministers, it's difficult for both to know everything and miscommunications can develop.”
- “Members who prefer one minister over the other sometimes seek to undermine the relationship.”
- “Ministers need time off together (with two unrelated ministers, one can always be “on duty”)

How can these problems be avoided?

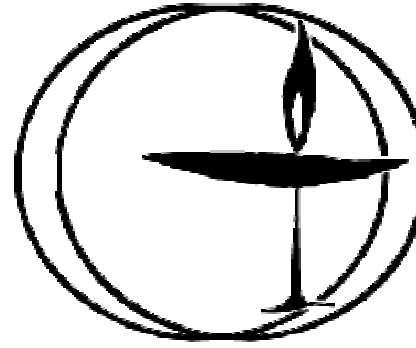
- “Be very clear about which one works with which committees *and* one minister does not get involved in the other's area of concern (if both need to know, both should be informed)”
- “Constant education of congregation on meaning of co-ministry plus constant “vigilance” of co-ministers not to fall into obvious traps.”
- “Effective Committee on Ministry and conflict resolution process”
- “Utilize each minister in the roles in which they are most effective.”

What else do we need to know?

We encourage you to talk to other congregations your size that have called clergy couples or co-ministry teams to find out how it has worked for their congregation. The following quote was compiled from the results of a survey mailed to congregations that had called co-ministers.

“Do it! . . . Be flexible . . . Be prepared for questions . . . Be ready for folks who have not had happy marriages to project potential ‘trouble’ onto the couple . . . Keep educating congregation & community . . . On the whole, it has worked well for us! . . . It's a relational way of working that many people don't experience in their lives and don't understand. At its best it can be an excellent model for the way the world needs to work.” And finally . . . “We ourselves treasure it deeply.” We hope you do too.

This draft brochure compiled by Revs. Kathleen Rolenz & Wayne Arnason; Co-ministers of the West Shore UU Church, Rocky River, OH; revised, by Rev Scott Sammler-Michael



Co-Ministry and Your Congregation

An informational
Booklet to help you

and your congregation learn more about Co-Ministry

Co-ministry may be a new idea in your congregation and you no doubt have some questions about how it might work. There are many congregations in the UUA that are served by clergy couples and the Clergy Couples Support Group has drawn on their experience to provide some basic information about what co-ministry might mean for your congregation. There are many ‘Ministry Teams’ serving our congregations, but studies show that married Co-Ministry teams are the most stable. Their commitment as life-partners is a bond deeper than any job description and makes them more likely to serve without disruption or break-up.

This brochure has been compiled from the results of a survey created by the First Unitarian Society of Denver, as well as information from a variety of co-minister’s packets.