

Partnership Ministry in The Episcopal Church in Colorado  
Experiences, Roles, Expectations, Best Practices, Lessons Learned  
A Field Guide

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**Preface:**

BISHOP CONTRIBUTION- Vision for Partnership Ministry (Ann & Mike Orr)

**Introduction & History:**

The Episcopal Church in Colorado is on the cutting edge of creative ministry to serve smaller congregations. The ministry of Mission Partnership Clergy (often called Partnership Vicars) finds its authority in The Canons for the Governance of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Colorado Canon 17.<sup>i</sup> This ministry is growing and will certainly continue as church membership declines nationally and locally. As of September 2018, there are 12 congregations involved in defined “partnerships,” although one of those is a dual denomination in a single parish (Craig). Of those 12 congregations, we have 6 defined partnerships, with 4 active partnership vicars. In one partnership, we have a recent vicar vacancy. We also have 2 other partnerships that are being actively defined, with 2 congregations involved in each. One of those congregations has previously been a part of a partnership, but their partner voted to close and they seek a new partner congregation. (Per Missioner for Transition Ministry & Congregational Development, Ann Fleming)

This exciting new ministry requires lay and ordained leadership to perform a wide variety of functions and duties. In an effort to assist new and existing Partnership Vicars & Lay Pastoral Leaders (LPLs), as well as the Commission on Ministry and others, this document considers roles, expectations, sample best practices as well as emerging issues and concerns. It is anticipated that this document will be updated and eventually developed into at least two comprehensive documents: A Field Guide for Best Practices for Partnership Vicars & Leaders and A Manual for Training Lay Pastoral Leaders (including continuing education).

Among the reasons for this work:

- Due to staffing shifts in the Bishop's Office as well as retiring Partnership Vicars, institutional memory is lacking and memorializing practices and experiences will be valuable to those who follow
- A catalog of existing partnerships and their configurations should be developed and maintained
- To serve as a model for the future
- To identify dreams and hopes for future ministry
- To lift up and clarify the need for creative, innovative ministries
- To emphasize the need for clear training materials for teaching and coaching Lay Pastoral Leaders
- To educate clergy and staff within the Episcopal Church in Colorado
- New Partnership Vicars need guidance in their role to ensure they "start well." Example: A new Partnership Vicar may need help when entering a parish situation that has Lay Pastoral Leaders who are already-trained and in place. For instance: Have the LPLs been prepared to serve under the new Vicar? Will the new Vicar be seen as a threat to what they (LPL's) perceive as a smoothly-running place? How can this transition be made to work more easily?

The authors of this collaborative document are current partnership vicars in concert with the Commission on Ministry and the Bishops Office. A Working Group comprised of past, current and retired partnership vicars and others provided input and guidance to the coordinators. It is hoped the current and retired(ing) Partnership Vicars will continue to provide input in this project.

### **Fundamentals of Partnerships for Mission**

The Church is the Body of Christ with many members, each part having a role and function. The cooperation of the whole comes from direction from the head of the Body, Jesus. The many members can be individual people, small groups with particular ministry functions, or congregations with particular callings for ministry in particular contexts. At times, ministry is better achieved through a cooperative effort of several congregations working together in a particular context. In any context, the Body is more effective as all the parts exercise their ministries toward the mission and vision given by Jesus, the Head.

## Characteristics of Partnerships for Mission

- Two or more congregations of any size may form a Mission Partnership.
- Congregations in partnership may be comprised of both Episcopal churches as well as other denominations with whom we are in communion—although it should be noted that other appropriate denominations may be scarce in our more rural and remote areas
- Congregations and/or special ministries must be in the same general geographic region.
- The congregations and/or special ministries covenant together to work cooperatively and collegially to share ministry, resources, and projects.
- Financial resources for the cooperative ministry come from the congregations, and may include grants from other sources, such as regions.
- Each individual congregation maintains their own identity, budget, and sends their own delegates to the Region and Diocesan Convention.
- Mission Partnership Ministry Team may consist of the following roles with the recognition that each Partnership is unique and has unique roles:

### **Clergy**

- *Partnership Vicar* – full time (or part-time) priest appointed by the Bishop with responsibility for oversight of the Mission Partnership and Ministry Team; assists the Ministry Team in implementing policy and mission; oversight of training of licensed lay ministries; engages in Mutual Ministry Review annually
- *Ministry Team Clergy* (rarely available, not typical) – full or part time priests or deacons serving in the Mission Partnership

### **Lay Pastoral Leaders**

- *Lay Pastoral Leader*- licensed lay leader who has successfully completed the discernment and required training to be commissioned by the Office of the Bishop with ongoing oversight of Vicar or authorized clergy mentor

## **Laity**

- *Ministry Team Lay Members* (as appropriate and available)– administrative or program staff (generally not compensated; e.g., Youth, Christian Formation, Parish Nurse, etc.), and/or licensed lay ministries serving in the Mission Partnership under the direction of the Partnership Vicar (preachers, pastoral leaders, worship leaders, Eucharistic visitors, Eucharistic ministers, and catechists)

## **Benefits of Mission Partnerships**

- Offers potential for maintaining integrity of the local congregation
- Maintains ministry in areas where resources for ministry are diminishing
- Offers potential for greater mission impact in a geographic context
- Promotes collegiality, networking, associations, and relational bonds for accomplishing God’s mission
- Pools resources for program, staff, and training opportunities
- Intentionally equips laity for the work of ministry
- Renews congregations in mission in interdependent relationships with other congregations and the local community contexts
- Gives churches the potential to: a) more effectively support uplifting programs within our communities, b) assist one another in financial and manpower shortfalls by higher critical mass of membership and income for defined partnership activities (e.g., joint outreach projects).
- By direct encouragement and role-modeling, churches can revitalize the spirituality and the energy of each church
- Mutual encouragement, support and evangelism.
- Loving, bonding with and learning from one another’s programs and practices. For example, we can look at look at each other’s outreach/evangelism and stewardship
- A call to mutual ministry among **all** the members of the congregations

## **Risks in Mission Partnerships**

- Falling back into old patterns, methods, or modes (e.g., self-protection and isolation) instead of working to learn new ways of being the church in a wider context of vision for the partnership

- Falling back into old images of church structures and expectations of the ordained and the laity
- Poor communication and accountability, thus losing sight of larger vision and mission
- Competition instead of cooperation (not valuing the part of each congregation in the mission strategy of the partnership)
- Clergy “burn-out” is real and must be prevented through mutual accountability between Lay Pastoral Leader, Clergy AND leadership in each congregation in the partnership

### **Setting Up a Partnership for Mission**

#### ***Discernment Phase:***

A clear and defined plan for a discernment process is important as most congregations are unfamiliar with what discernment is and/or how to go about it.

A broader vision for mission in a geographic area can be initiated by:

- Clergy, Bishop’s Committee or Vestry of a congregation
- Regional Missioner
- Missioner for Transition Ministry & Congregational Development, Canon to the Ordinary, or Bishop
- Lay members of congregations

Initiate discernment conversation with area congregations, special ministries, clergy, and Bishop’s Committees or Vestries. If there is a consensus to move forward from each congregation, select a discernment team with two or three representatives plus the clergy of the congregations to enter a more formal time of discernment. (Representatives might be selected by the congregation as a whole by submitting names of people they would trust with such a process. These people may or may not be on the vestry or bishop’s committee.)

Discernment Team:

- Establish a process, timeline, structures of communication with each congregation, and a commitment for prayer support from each congregation

- Each congregation needs to do assessment work: internal and external audits, core values, and sense of purpose it brings to the mission partnership
- A study of the demographic data of the geographic region needs to inform the partnership mission and vision
- Discern an emerging vision as assets, resources, talents, networks, associations, and demographic needs and hungers overlap.
- Involve the congregations in discernment of vision possibilities, building on strengths, passions, and places where God’s Spirit is moving.
- Involve the Bishop’s Office for the formation of the Partnership for Mission by meeting with the Missioner for Transition Ministry & Congregational Development to review the process and then petitioning the Bishop for the establishment of a Partnership for Mission and the appointment of a Partnership Vicar.

***Formation Phase:***

Formal voting by the Vestries and Bishop’s Committees to form a Partnership for Mission as outlined in the canons. (Canon 17)

The wardens draw up a letter of agreement between the congregations and the Partnership Vicar outlining the vision, fiscal responsibilities, and ministry expectations of the congregations and a job description for the Partnership Vicar. This document should be more than a “Vicar Agreement” and should include reasons for the partnership, financial arrangements, and time expectations for the Vicar.

***Establish the Ministry Team:***

- The Partnership Vicar convenes the Ministry Team comprised of other clergy in the Partnership, program and administrative staff, and licensed lay ministers to establish job descriptions to accomplish the mission of the Partnership and pastoral oversight for each congregation in the Partnership.
- The Ministry Team establishes working relationships, regular meeting times, continuing training and formation opportunities, and communication and accountability structures for their work.

- The Partnership Vicar establishes the worship schedule for the Partnership with the support of the Ministry Team.
- A Mutual Ministry Review—of the clergy and LPLs—shall be conducted annually with the Wardens

*Recognition of the Partnership for Mission:*

- Within the Region at the next Regional Delegate Meeting after the formation of the Mission Partnership
- At the next Diocesan Convention

*Agreements necessary for Mission Partnerships:*

- Between churches
- With the Partnership Vicar

**Partnership Missions in Colorado**

Partnership defined (Canonically) & in practice—do we want to put the narrative here rather than in an appendix?

***Current Active Mission Partnerships***

- **Upper Rio Grande:** Rev. Robert “Bob” Pope. Now consists of St. Augustine, Creede and St. Stephen’s, Monte Vista. At one time, also included St. Francis in South Fork until that congregation closed.
- **Northeast:** Rev. Steven Hagerman. St. Charles, Fort Morgan and Prince of Peace, Sterling
- **Garfield County:** Now Rev. Wendy Huber, and includes St. Barnabas, Glenwood Springs, All Saint’s, Battlement Mesa, and St. John’s, New Castle. Formerly was Rev. EJ Rivet and All Saint’s, Battlement Mesa and St. John’s, New Castle.
- **Southeast:** Rev. Jennifer Shadle, St. Paul’s, Lamar and Holy Cross/St. Andrew’s, La Junta. Previously Rev. Mary Hendricks
- **Grand County:** seeking interim, Trinity, Kremmling and St. John’s, Granby. Was Rev. Mark Ricker until Sept 2.
- **St. Mark’s Church of Grace,** Rev. Bain White. Was formerly in partnership with St. Paul’s, Steamboat Springs. Has reformulated its partnership as existing in one congregation and comprising 2 denominations (ELCA and Episcopal).



- **Innovations:** Ann Myers Martin commissioned as LPL June 2018 in a single congregation, St. Paul's, Central City, with clergy mentorship and oversight by Rev. Cal Gray and Rev. Rebecca "Becky" Jones

### ***Developing/Discerning Partnerships***

- **Western Slope:** St. John's, Ouray and St. Michael's, Telluride with Rev. Lucas Grubbs. Previously Rev. David Vickers, although partnership was not formalized between now-closed St. Paul's, Montrose and St. John's, Ouray. LPLs have led worship at St. Michael's, Telluride, but clear parameters need to be defined.
- **Southern:** St. Benedict, La Veta and St. Peter's, Pueblo formed a partnership with Rev. Alex Howard, after partnership between St. Benedict and St. Thomas, Alamosa was dissolved (also Rev. Alex Howard). St. Benedict then partnered with St. Peter's, Pueblo with Rev. Alex Howard until Alex retired July 2017. Following his retirement, St. Benedict voted to close, and St. Peter's needs a new partner congregation. Talks are reopening with St. Raphael's, Security, with help of interim Rev. Twyla Zittle and 4 LPLs at St. Peter's.

### ***Past/Pending***

- Good Samaritan, Gunnison and All Saints, Crested Butte with Rev. Bill Waltz. Has not functioned as a partnership for about 4 years. *With Bill's retirement Sept 1, consideration for 3-church partnership with Gunnison, Crested Butte, and St. James, Lake City.*
- St. Barnabas, Cortez and St. Paul, Mancos with Rev. Leigh Waggoner until St. Paul closed in 2016.
- St. James, Meeker and St. Timothy's, Rangely with Rev. Scott Hollenbeck until St. Timothy's disbanded approximately 2015/2016.
- Trinity, Kremmling and St. John's, Breckinridge with Rev. Karen LaJoy Smith existed from approximately 2014/2015

### **Attributes & Role of the Partnership Vicar**

Based on the experience of Partnership Vicars in Colorado there are helpful attributes for this ministry that include: entrepreneurial; high energy; creativity; patience; and a love of the small church. Partnership Vicars should be flexible; able to delegate; able to laugh with and at oneself and be deeply grounded

spiritually. One must realize it's **not** all about you! Strong organizational skills are helpful to juggle multiple obligations. This unique ministry can be time consuming and some might consider it difficult to juggle multiple congregations. Most partnership vicars are compensated part-time but often find the work requiring full time commitment. This can require clear boundaries and expectations. This ministry may sometimes be difficult and occasionally may feel isolated or lonely, but the rewards are many. Smaller congregations tend to be kind, understanding and forgiving towards their clergy and deeply appreciate their clergy. Small town ministry is about community ministry. Ministering to the wider community beyond the four walls of the church is often the primary work. Experienced Partnership Vicars consider this work more about relationship than role.

The Partnership Vicar is the priest charged with fulfilling those duties outlined in the Examination at Ordination: to work as a pastor, priest and teacher... to proclaim by word and deed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to fashion your life in accordance with its precepts. (BCP pg. 531 The Examination Ordination: Priest) In small (often rural) communities and churches, the further words of the Examination are touchstones for this ministry:

You are to love and serve the people among whom you work, caring alike for young and old, strong and weak, rich and poor. You are to preach, to declare God's forgiveness to penitent sinners, to pronounce God's blessing, to share in the administration of Holy Baptism and in the celebration of the mysteries of Christ's Body and Blood, and to perform the other ministrations entrusted to you. In all that you do, you are to nourish Christ's people from the riches of his grace, and strengthen them to glorify God in this life and in the life to come. (BCP Ordination: Priest)

Of course, the priest must provide those things only a priest can offer—the ABC's: Absolution, Blessing, Consecration and the sacraments, especially marriage and baptism. Some use the amusing description: "hatch, match & dispatch" adding funeral leadership. Partnership Vicars may find themselves doing a large number of additional duties including honey bee removal, plumbing, and lawn care.

Pastoral care is provided in crisis situations, AND this ministry is unique as there are lay leaders specially trained to assist in those areas often managed by a priest alone. The priest may be present for death and dying or critical health and

relationship issues but others are available to provide pastoral care: Lay Pastoral Leaders.

Lay Pastoral Leaders (LPLs) must be empowered to provide important services from leading worship to preaching to pastoral care to leading formation to teaching the catechumenate. A priest cannot possibly serve multiple congregations in often distant locations without granting the authority to the LPL to lead. This is a different dynamic for many priests and may require some adjustment from prior “non-partnership” churches.

Getting out of the way of the LPL can be difficult for some clergy and requires clear communication and expectations. Regular meetings with LPL(s) is highly recommended. Further, other lay leaders must be relied upon to provide other services including: ministry for youth and children; visiting shut-ins; etc. Clergy must give permission to the laity to lead—worship, teaching, leadership, ministry in the community, pastoral care.

As clergy one must lead from one’s own strengths; clergy must rely on their own adjunct skills. Since many of these churches are small and clergy are often part-time priests serving multiple congregations—self-care is imperative.

Other important considerations include assisting the church in planning for the future; where will the church be tomorrow (bringing a sense of what happens beyond NOW). Using both strategic thinking (a Five-Ten Year Plan, for instance) as well as missional identity (what are we as the church and where are we going into the future) will help churches to see their future realistically and with excitement and hope.

A Partnership Vicar is NOT a traditional priest role but a collaborator—collaborative leadership requires letting go of some more traditional perceptions of parish ministry. The Vicar will remain a Liturgist/ Sacramentalist for traditional and non-traditional worship and must negotiate worship schedules with multiple churches.

The small church is very different from the large urban church. There is often no compensated staff needing supervision. The music program may rely upon “Synthetic” music= “Syn-thia”, the computer organist, to manage the music

program. In some instances, recorded music is considered, but authority and methods must be carefully considered.

Partnership Vicars serve as trainer and mentor for Lay Pastoral Leaders (LPL) by assisting in discerning a call to the ministry, training the LPLs and mentoring LPLs. This requires ongoing training and relationship with the LPLs. A new Vicar must clarify the relationship between new Partnership Vicars and LPLs in existing partnerships.

There are many things a new Partnership Vicar will want to examine once called/appointed, including the following matters:

- Culture/Community of the churches in the partnership
- Size(s) of the participating congregations
- Shifting the perception from priest-centric to the ministry of the laity
- Geographic distances and managing the travel especially in mountain communities
- Mission & Vision: What is the mission of the church and how is your work furthering the mission?

Clergy must engage in self care in this ministry as much or more than other types of ministry. Often these clergy are retired and compensated part-time, yet may be expected to work full time. This temptation should be resisted. Clergy must develop methods to actually step away from ministry from time to time. Other self-care tips include methods to keep batteries charged e.g., a defined rule of life; prayer BEFORE you pick up your phone in the morning; etc.

Funding sources for Mission Partnerships include pledge and plate (as a traditional church), and may include regional grants, and in some instances facility rental or community funds on ministry specific projects. Many Mission Partnerships in Colorado receive grants from their regions and should be encouraged to apply for these on an annual basis. Currently regional grants must align with the Four Areas of Strategic Focus of the Diocese. The primary focus of Regional Grants is to fund ministries based within the geographic boundaries of that region, specifically:

1. Mission initiatives developed by the Region

2. Mission initiatives sponsored by parishes, missions, or special congregations within the Region
3. Collaborative mission projects initiated by multiple congregations in the Region
4. Mission initiatives supported by Diocesan Institutions
5. Mission initiatives identified, developed and endorsed by the Office of the Bishop that have direct impact upon the Region
6. Support for parishes, missions, or special congregations when such support is deemed strategically important by Regional Executive Committees in consultation with the Bishop

Regional Grants are made to parishes, missions, special congregations, diocesan institutions, and ministries sponsored by parishes, missions, special congregations or diocesan institutions. Regional Grants are not made to individuals. To be considered, grant requests must demonstrate fulfillment of one or more of the Four Areas of Strategic Focus of the Diocese: Living Missionally at a Grassroots Level; Establishing Radical Generosity as a Core Pattern of Life; Engaging Substantively with the Suffering of the World; Committing Fully to Evangelizing Youth and Young Adults.

### **Role of Lay Pastoral Leaders<sup>ii</sup>**

As the catechism reminds us the ministry of the laity is to represent Christ and his Church; to Bear witness to him wherever they may be *according to gifts given them*; to Carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; to Take their place in life, worship & governance of the church.

The qualities and characteristics of Lay Pastoral Leaders may include: compassion, spiritual maturity, commitment, a good speaking voice, trustworthiness, and the ability to keep confidences. They should display comfort in front of people, be team players, be flexible setting tone, and be capable of leadership. They should demonstrate the ability to be relevant, spiritually mature, emotionally healthy, and able to set and maintain good boundaries.

Each LPL discerns a call to ministry and is trained by the clergy overseeing the Partnership. This training is outlined in Appendix C. The LPL is installed by a member of the Bishops Staff, typically the Missioner for Transition Ministry &

Congregational Development. An LPL is authorized by the Bishop to Administer Reserved Sacrament using the Diocese promulgated Liturgy (See Appendix D).

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<sup>i</sup> **CANON 17: Mission Partnerships**

Section 1. With the recommendation of the Office of the Bishop, two or more congregations or Diocesan Institutions in geographical proximity may join together to form a Mission Partnership, provided that at least three fourths of the Vestry or Bishop's Committee, or governing board of each entity votes affirmatively to do so. These entities shall retain parish, mission, or institution status so long as they meet provisions for the same under Diocesan Canons.

Section 2. Each congregation belonging to a Mission Partnership shall retain its own identity, Vestry or Bishop's Committee, congregational budget and delegates to Diocesan Convention. The congregations in a Mission Partnership shall, therefore, be represented in Regional Meetings and Diocesan Convention as individual congregations. Each Vestry or Bishop's Committee, shall retain full control over their respective congregational properties and temporal affairs, as provided by the Canons of the National Church and of this Diocese.

Section 3. The Bishop shall, after consulting with the Mission Partnership Clergy, appoint from among the Mission Partnership Clergy the Mission Partnership Vicar. In the calling of a new clergy to the Mission Partnership, the Bishop shall be consulted and will have oversight of the calling of clergy in keeping with the Diocesan Policy and Canons.

Section 4. From and after the adoption of this Canon, any entity that becomes a member of a Mission Partnership does so for a commitment of not fewer than three (3) years. After the initial three (3) year period, any entity desiring to withdraw from the Mission Partnership may do so only upon the action of all of the following:

- (a) An affirmative vote of at least three fourths of its own Vestry, Bishop's Committee, or governing board.
- (b) Consent of the Bishop's Office.

<sup>ii</sup> **Expectations for Partnership Vicars with Licensed Lay Pastoral Leaders, Worship Leaders, and Preachers (Draft Episcopal Church in Colorado Document)**

Discernment:

- Help design a discernment process for these licensed lay ministries based on the Discernment Guide from the Commission on Ministry
- Decide how much the whole congregation should take part in the discernment based on congregational capacity for discernment
- Be clear about your role in the process, making the final decision on who moves forward in the process

Qualities for Pastoral Leaders:

- Compassion
- Commitment
- Trustworthy, able to keep confidences
- Team players
- Natural leaders
- Spiritually mature
- Emotionally healthy, good boundaries

for Worship Leaders and Preachers:

- Spiritually mature
- Good speaking voice
- Comfort in front of people
- Ability to be flexible setting tone
- Ability to be relevant

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Training and Formation:

- Oversee the training process utilizing outside trainers as needed/desired and following the training recommendations of the Commission on Ministry
- Meet with licensed lay ministry candidates on a regular basis (remotely if not in person) to discern their readiness to be licensed.
- Oversee continuing formation for the licensed lay leaders
- Work with worship leaders, and pastoral leaders on “hands on” liturgy at the altar training
- Work with preachers on sermon preparation, delivery, and feedback
- Work with pastoral leaders on pastoral care, especially for the dying, funerals, and emergency baptisms
- Help build confidence for pastoral leaders to oversee, resource, or lead Christian formation, Bible Studies, and confirmation preparation (if vicar is not available)
- Train pastoral leaders and/or wardens on recording services and diocesan reporting

Accountability:

- Conduct annual mutual ministry reviews
- Ensure they get to Diocesan training events