



Is it Time to Add to Our Congregation's Staff . . . Maybe Call an Associate Pastor?

How do we know if this is the time to take this big step?

Congregations moving from **pastoral size** (50-150 worshipers on a Saturday evening/Sunday morning) to **program size** (150-350 on a Saturday/Sunday) are often the ones who begin to ask this question. The further a congregation moves from 150 toward 350, the more urgent the question becomes. At the same time, smaller congregations may have special reasons for adding staff, and larger ones for increasing the staff that is already in place. A helpful article is entitled, "How to Minister Effectively in Family, Pastoral, Program, and Corporate Sized Churches," Appendix D in the Alban Institute Publication *Discerning Your Congregation's Future: A Strategic and Spiritual Approach*, by Oswald and Friedrich.

Those who study congregational life often suggest that appropriate professional staffing of a congregation is described as the ratio of one professional or program staff person for each 100 worshipers. And, they are quick to add, **congregations will want to reduce that ratio if they want to grow** both in numbers and in discipleship.

For example, a congregation of 200 worshipers on a Saturday/Sunday is appropriately staffed with two professional or program staff people -- unless it is staffing for growth. Then congregational leaders will want to think about adding additional part-time program staff.

Just what do you mean by "professional or program" staff?

Professional or program staff are people who are usually trained through seminary, college or graduate work. Those who are pastors in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have graduated from seminary and have successfully completed candidacy for ordained ministry. Associates in ministry, diaconal ministers, and deaconesses in the ELCA have also completed prescribed courses of academic study and have successfully completed candidacy requirements. The study courses and candidacy requirements differ for each category of public ministry as do the ways in which each professional staff person offers her/his gifts. Some are pastors, some musicians, some administrators, some coordinators of ministry with families with youth, some evangelists, some catechists, some spiritual directors, some pastoral counselors. Staff members who have successfully completed candidacy requirements and who have been called to congregations are on the official rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

But there are other educated, experienced, committed people who haven't gone through candidacy, but who offer their gifts to the church and derive income to support themselves and their families while enhancing the ministry and mission of the church. These people are not on the rosters of the ELCA. Many congregations have musicians, parish workers, youth workers, etc. who are professional or program staff people for whom congregations give tremendous thanks even though they're not rostered.

Not usually included in the terms "professional or program" staff are the support staff people in your congregation: secretaries, bookkeepers, custodians, etc. -- valuable people who offer their support to professional or program staff people. Without these valuable support staff people, congregational life is much more difficult!

Also not included are the dozens and hundreds of disciples who offer their spiritual gifts for the common good.

This is too complicated. We just want to hire an Associate Pastor to help pastor out.

Ah, but why??

The intentions of a congregation's leaders can be very good. "Pastor is so tired. She/he isn't always taking her/his day off, and there are some times when I know that her/his vacation has been cut short. We need to get more help for pastor." Yes. But each pastor is called by God, as are we all, to live a holistic life. We are all called to lives of spiritual, emotional, social, physical, vocational, and intellectual well-being. Each of us, pastor included, needs to learn how to draw the kinds of boundaries that allow us to live this way. This time of pondering staffing needs is a good time to review and re-shape with the current pastor(s) his/her position description. Be sure to ask your Mutual Ministry Committee to be involved in this process.

Adding professional and program staff is best understood as a congregation's decision to grow in discipleship, in mission, and in ministry, not "to help pastor out." Adding this kind of staff must be "owned" by the congregation for the sake of the Gospel.

How does a congregation do all this?

Consult with Bishop Warren and Pastor Onstad in the Bishop's Office. They may work with you or be able to assign a Southeastern Synod Call Team member to travel with you through this exciting process. They'll provide you with resources, ideas they've gained from other congregations, and their personal prayer support.

One of the things that they will suggest is that the Congregation Council form a "Search Team" or "Call Team" or "Discernment Team" * to take the leadership with this important ministry. One member of the team should be a Council member who can act as liaison. Everyone in the congregation should know who these team members are, and can invite folks to talk with them about their ministry.

* "Discernment Team" is a name that you might want to consider using. Yes, it's an unusual title, but it does reflect well the breadth and depth of what you are about. You're thinking of so much more than simply searching for the right staff person(s). You're also working hard to discern just what shape and size that your staff should be. Focusing on this word could help the congregation think about this process in a different way.

Just what would a "Search" or "Discernment Team" do?

A "Search" or "Discernment Team" will do well to work on a process that involves:

1. Establishing or re-visiting mission goals--your hopes and dreams for your congregation's future. The Great Commission and other Biblical references will be important as you affirm or reaffirm your desire to grow in discipleship and in your effectiveness in reaching the church homeless. How can you grow in your abilities to go, make disciples, baptize and teach? How can you grow in your conviction that Jesus is with you always as you do this, even to the end of the age? How can you grow in your abilities to encourage and comfort each other?

There are many resources for developing mission goals. One excellent resource is the Alban Institute publication mentioned above, *Discerning Your Congregation's Future: A Strategic and Spiritual Approach*. Another Alban Institute resource that you may wish to read is Rendle's book, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*.

The leadership of your pastor(s) will be crucial as you identify your mission goals.

An important note: Congregations often want to by-pass this step in the process. But mission goal development is vital as you begin your search for additional staff. Without clarifying your Christ-centered and mission-minded goals, you may build the wrong kind of staff!

2. Exploring what leadership resources you need to realize your missional hopes and dreams. You will want to review leadership possibilities in your own congregation that are currently untapped, to explore the staffing patterns of other congregations, to consult with your synod staff, to contract with an Alban Institute or other consultant, to draw together key leaders for brainstorming - -or to do all of the above! Consider full time and part time staff people, ordained and lay, male and female.

Some congregations describe their staff arrangement as "pastor and associate pastor," "pastor and second pastor," "pastor and pastor," "co-pastor and co-pastor," "pastor and associate in ministry or diaconal minister or deaconess," etc.

A quick decision to "hire an Associate Pastor" can result in missing many creative and effective options for growing in mission. Indeed, you may have started this search process looking for an Associate Pastor - -and will decide to head in a different direction, as you review your mission goals and the leadership resources you need.

Your pastor(s) must be involved in every step of this process.

3. Preparing the congregational profile that will describe your mission goals and resulting staffing plan. Use the ELCA Congregation Profile or the new ELCA Congregation Mission Profile. Add to the profile a position description for your new staff position that will clearly state responsibilities, accountability, and the spiritual and emotional support that will be available.

Involve your Mutual Ministry Committee in developing this position description, and develop plans for their on-going role in clarifying responsibilities, establishing accountability, and developing support for the new staff that will emerge.

Your pastor(s) should be involved in every step of this part of the process.

Note: An easy mistake to make in adding another pastor to your staff is to think of that pastor as the "Youth Pastor," or "Education Pastor," and to exclude that pastor from the pastoral acts of preaching, presiding at weddings, baptisms, and funerals, and pastoral counseling. Should you set up a pastor's position description in this way, you can expect that this associate pastor will be with your congregation for but a brief time.

4. Count the cost of adding staff and ask the congregation to financially support your decisions for mission. When the congregation has been involved in numbers 1, 2, and 3 above, this step follows quite naturally, and folks will want to know about this component of the decision-making. When the congregation's not been involved, this step is difficult, indeed.

Your pastor(s) will help guide the congregation into appropriate stewardship. The witness of lay members will be absolutely vital.

Consult the Southeastern Synod's Compensation Guidelines for the year in which staff will be added. Note vacation and continuing education guidelines as well as the guidelines for salary, social security or social security offset, and housing (if the new staff is ordained).

A common misconception is captured in this proposal: "Let's add staff and count on him/her bringing in the new people who will pay for the additional compensation costs in our budget." This would be accurate if staff members were sales people, working on a profit margin and a per capita commission! But evangelical outreach is the work of all the people of God. A new staff member will help equip members to grow in discipleship. But membership decisions to reach out to others and to reach deeper into pockets will be the most important factors in membership and financial growth.

5. One important guideline that will inform all that you do is "communicate, communicate, communicate" about every part of this process. Because congregation members differ, you'll do well to communicate through a variety of means in a variety of settings. You'll want to consider Temple Talks during worship, open forums on Wednesday evenings, the newsletter, pot-luck suppers, cottage meetings, video and audio cassettes, youth events, women's circles, the men's breakfast club, etc.

6. Meet with your bishop's representative to present the results of your process. Follow his/her leadership in securing and interviewing candidates.

7. Pray, pray, pray that God's will and wisdom would be your guide. Know the courage of your convictions. Tithe, and urge others to know the joy of tithing. Resist falling into "old ways of thinking." Be of good cheer!

We'll be grooming our Associate Pastor to take over when and if our Senior Pastor resigns or retires. That's a real added benefit!

In the corporate world, this is most certainly a typical model for identifying the next CEO of the corporation. But taking the practices of the corporate world and bringing them into the church isn't always the best plan. In the church, the staffing is built around the gifts, skills, experiences, and priorities of the "Senior Pastor" or head of staff, whatever the title. You'll add professional and program staff to complement the spiritual gifts that the head of staff offers. An associate pastor is called by a congregation, not hired, to be part of that team.

Congregations and pastors have taught us that it can be a critical mistake to ask that Associate Pastor to become the Senior Pastor, or head of staff, should that Senior Pastor resign or retire -- or die in office. The spiritual gifts that an Associate Pastor has may not be the gifts that the congregation needs to realize the hopes and dreams of its next chapter. And the congregation who has accepted a pastor as Associate may have a difficult time fully accepting the Associate as Senior Pastor. Of course, there are exceptions to this wisdom. The Holy Spirit loves to surprise us! But there are many, many painful stories that would advise you to resist this possibility.

In the Southeastern Synod, a call to an Associate Pastor, associate in ministry, diaconal minister or deaconess -- a rostered staff member -- is co-terminus with the Senior Pastor's call. This means that when the Senior Pastor's call is over, so, too, is the call to these rostered professional or program staff people. It is wise to consider this same arrangement for all program and support staff people, rostered or non-rostered. When the Senior Pastor's leaving is announced, staff members will need to submit their resignation to the Congregation Council, who may choose to table those resignations until the next Senior Pastor is called. It is the right of the newly called Senior Pastor or head of staff to work with the congregation in building a new team for mission and ministry. She/he will work with the congregation council to decide about retention of people from the previous team. A new calling or hiring process will follow to re-establish the team.

Note that this discussion may be different in congregations where the pastoral staff arrangement is not that of "pastor and associate pastor," or "pastor and second pastor." Co-pastor arrangements or "pastor and pastor" configurations may have been established with different agreements. They may not be co-terminus calls. Please consult with Bishop Warren in establishing these arrangements, so that he can review them in order to offer his advice and consent, when appropriate. This will be an important step in avoiding confusion and conflict later.

There are many other important avenues and issues to explore as you discern your answers to the important question, "Is it time to add to our congregation's staff?" Please let Bishop Warren and Pastor Onstad in the Bishop's Office know about your discoveries and ideas. We want to keep growing in our understanding of this important process, and add to these guidelines what you have learned. Above all, remember that this process is about mission and ministry, in the name of Jesus. It is about our continuing growth as Great Commission congregations. Thanks be to God!

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