



A DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

MULTI-CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE SERIES

Multi-congregational structures are beneficial to the starting and sustaining of new works and transitioning churches by utilizing church facilities. District Superintendents are key to developing this movement to better utilize our facility resources. However, the superintendent needs to be aware of a variety of factors that can impede or enhance these efforts.

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IDENTIFY MULTI-CONGREGATIONAL POSSIBILITIES

Look for facilities that are underutilized by the existing congregation. In many cases the community around the church location has changed. The core of the existing congregation may no longer match the demographics of the community surrounding it.

Each cultural group in the community is a potential target group for a new ministry, which may develop into a congregation. Often, the existing congregation may be in decline and facing critical mass issues. By drawing one or two other congregations to jointly share a location, finances are enhanced, ministry activity is increased, and the church more adequately reflects the community that it seeks to reach.

Sometimes, a group may come to us looking for a location for worship and ministry. Care should be taken to determine if this group may join with us to maintain simply a rental type agreement. We should take every step possible to launch our own ministry to an unreached group before committing our facilities to a group that may not share our holiness mission.

**JOHN L.
DENNEY**

**DISTRICT
SUPERINTENDENT,
SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA
DISTRICT, CHURCH
OF THE NAZARENE**

GIVE CAREFUL ATTENTION TO ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

When efforts are initiated to establish multiple congregations in shared facilities, careful thought should be given to some formal agreement for working together. The most basic, but possibly the least desirable from a relational standpoint, is a rental agreement. This is typically the case where a non-Nazarene group is involved or when the use of a facility is for a very limited period of time. Where there is intent for a longer duration of involvement or there is consideration of a permanent relationship, a covenant agreement established on shared vision and mission should be developed and reviewed on a periodic basis. A sample covenant document is available on the USA/Canada Region's website. Some multi-congregational churches are even going so far as implementing a "Multi-Congregational Church Board". This structure may develop in at least two ways:

- a) An existing congregation invites one or more other groups to share their facility and become joint owners by way of the multi-congregational board. Each participating congregation has official voting powers in the multi-congregational board through some form of representation agreed upon by each member congregation and formalized in the articles of incorporation. In this case, the existing congregation actually gives away its property to the multi-congregational board by transferring deed of ownership.

- b) In some cases, the district may launch a multi-congregational church from scratch. In this type of approach, existing groups who do not have property, as well as NewStarts, may come together to acquire church property. For this to happen, the District Superintendent or someone representing the District will likely be deeply involved, assisting in the development of steps to organization, purchase of property, finances, and so on.

An example of this is the Mid-City Church of the Nazarene in San Diego, California. Four congregations share in the ownership of the church property and have representation allocated based on a formula that accounts for each congregation's financial and people strength. There are presently seven Nazarene congregations (language groups) sharing the Mid-City Church property.

When two or more congregations form a multi-congregational structure, it is important to note that the authority of the multi-congregational board extends solely over those areas pertaining to joint or shared operations. These functions include writing of policies that govern the multi-congregational system, financing facility operations, hiring of staff to serve the interests of the whole, and the scheduling of facility use by the various congregations. In this type of organization each of the fully organized members of the congregations retain full Manual responsibilities and privileges, such as calling of the pastor, and developing its own finances and ministry plan. These, as well as other important points, are spelled out in the articles of incorporation and by-laws.

FACE THE CHALLENGES TO MULTI-CONGREGATIONAL ORGANIZATION

There is tremendous missional potential in organizing multi-congregational churches.

However, any district superintendent interested in pursuing this model should be aware of some challenges that he/she will most certainly face. These challenges will need time and much attention to navigate successfully. This is especially true until a district works through two or three pilot type scenarios resulting in effective, efficient, reproducible models. As we succeed in these efforts, the district will develop experienced individuals in the ranks of the ministry and laity who can serve as resource people to assist in future situations on the district.

In the beginning it is important for the district superintendent to be closely involved in the process in order to gain knowledge. Later, he/she will be able to train and delegate leadership and organizational tasks to others, thereby multiplying the missional potential of the church. Since most of our churches now exist in communities that are multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, in time it is certainly possible that a majority of our churches will have two or more congregations worshipping in shared facilities.

- a) **Cultural Diversity:** Different cultures have different ways of doing things. Pacing is important when bringing other cultures together to plan schedules, deal with financial matters, etc. Some people seem to be more assertive and others more laid back. Finding the right pace in developing different aspects of the multi-congregational church is essential.
- b) **Communication:** It is very possible that most of the multi-congregational board meetings and joint services will need interpretation in two or more languages. This in itself can increase the time needed to accomplish basic activities. In addition, care should be taken to make sure that something isn't "lost in the translation" when it comes to sensitive discussions.
- c) **Legal Expertise:** If a church seeks to organize or re-organize with an official incorporation of a multi-congregational church board, legal advice will be needed to file appropriate articles and by-laws of incorporation that adequately defines the legal and business operation of the church. The Southern California District has sample copies of articles of incorporation that have been adapted from articles first written for the Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene when Dr. Ron Benefiel was pastor. Because each situation is unique, it would be helpful to have a local Nazarene attorney familiar with incorporation, assist in these matters.
- d) **Ownership vs. Stewardship:** A subtle but very real challenge to any shared use of facilities is the need to transition from an "ownership" mentality to a "stewardship" mentality. Ownership says, "We built this building, we paid for it, therefore we are in control of it." Stewardship says "God has blessed us with this property and building. It is our responsibility to use it in the very best way possible to reach people for Christ and build His Kingdom." The bottom line - it's much easier to give something away that isn't ours to keep anyway.

- e) Independence vs. Dependence: We have learned very well through our world mission endeavors that developing an indigenous church is better than the paternalistic approach. We must apply this principle in the USA/Canada mission field as well. We must learn to turn over control earlier rather than later. Regardless of culture or ethnicity, each group and each person must know they are valued as equals as we serve together as co-laborers in the Kingdom of God.

We have taken a very brief overview of the multi-congregational church. There is much yet to be learned on this subject. The hurdles to developing a healthy multi-congregational church may seem too high at times. However, the rewards are much greater. This approach will enable us to maximize the great investment we already have in facilities and will result in dynamic, multi-ethnic/multi-cultural ministries that increasingly reflect the demographic face of their communities.