

BUILDING THE TEAM

The Council on Ministries, is indeed God's people, the Body of Christ, gathered for worship, for study, and (largely) for developing ministries. Thus it devotes part of its energy to being the kind of fellowship that the church is always called to be: Its members care for one another. They are committed to a common mission. They share the responsibility for reaching that mission.

But in these groups we take persons seriously for another reason: That is the best way to get the work done. The social sciences are showing us the close relationship between certain desirable qualities of a group's life and its ability to accomplish the work it sets out to do. Taking time to build these qualities into a group is therefore not a luxury, but a way of increasing its effectiveness and efficiency.

We desire these personal qualities in the Council on Ministries and related groups for our own satisfaction. For most of us have learned by now which kinds of meetings are fulfilling and which kind are just meetings. We have learned to enjoy those where we are really treated as human beings, where we can feel a mutual trust and support, where we can participate freely and vigorously, where our talents are needed and used, and where we are enthusiastic about the outcomes of our work.

For these reasons, most of us want the Council on Ministries to be more than "another committee." We want it to be a team that is growing in certain qualities of its common life. What are these qualities?

SIX QUALITIES OF GROUP LIFE

Here are six quite general understandings as to what is needed in a personal work group. How does your Council on Ministries rate against these ideals?

1. Warm atmosphere: Perhaps the basic ingredient is a personal, informal group climate. People are relaxed. They feel at ease with one another. The procedures they use are not excessively formal. There is a lot of casual, individual interaction. People are interested in each other, and support one another. Even the room, the arrangement of seating, and the manner of dress contribute to this general feeling tone.

2. Personal motivation: Group participants are present because they want to be. They are not just being loyal. They are excited about the potential for their congregation's ministry and they have a stake in it. There is a theological commitment involved: They believe God is sending the church into his world for a ministry. They have the task of shaping the ministries their congregation is to offer. And they want to get at it. They agree to invest so many hours of their time in this imperative work.

3. Sense of direction: Group members know why they are there. The items to be discussed and the decisions to be made are clear to all. By means of the agenda and other procedures the chairman helps everyone stay "on board" and move toward a common destination. If an unforeseen item comes up, he helps the group decide whether it needs attention or is just a tangent. These people know where they are going.

4. Clear communication: Members say what they have to say clearly and briefly. They share opinions and information and invite other group members to do the same. They listen to one another and check to see if they have heard correctly. They try to understand even the points of view that are different from theirs. They look each other in the eye and respond directly to what has been said. They help the group by clarifying, elaborating, and, occasionally, summarizing previous points.

5. Mutual openness: They communicate not only their ideas, but their feelings as well. They trust one another enough to be quite open about personal opinions

and experiences. When these are shared, even though they may be negative, the persons involved are still accepted. It is a group where people feel free to try out fragile new ideas, or unpopular ideas, and to challenge or support these on their merits. They are honest and not afraid of conflict.

6. Shared leadership: Everyone in the group feels responsible for the group and actively participates in guiding it. The chairman is not the only leader. Each member shares the leadership by taking part from time to time in various responsible ways. At any point someone with an insight can speak up and make a suggestion that will move the group forward. The chairman and other designated leaders try to share leadership with all members in this way.

These general qualities may all sound excellent. But how can you help them really happen in a specific group?

GROUP BUILDING PROCEDURES

Here are ten methods you can use to help develop your Council on Ministries and other groups as personal and effective planning teams.

1. Plan for enough time together. If council members are to be a fellowship, they will need to meet once or twice a month and for enough hours to get to know one another. A new group might begin its work with a longer session of at least six hours, perhaps in a retreat setting.

2. Find a comfortable place to meet. If possible, use a light, colorful, informal room. Arrange comfortable chairs in a circle, around tables if needed. Add music, refreshments, and other personal touches if desired. Help people feel it is a place they want to come.

3. Encourage conversation. Allow time for people to chat informally with one another.

4. Build the agenda together. At the close of one meeting, list what must be considered at the next. In coming weeks add matters that arise. The chairman and pastor can confer and bring a well-organized agenda to the next meeting. The group can then add other matters.

5. Avoid mere reporting. Look to the future, not the past. Focus on needs and issues. When examining past ministries, evaluate them carefully.

6. Celebrate your Christian fellowship. Through occasional worship together, confess your common faith and your identity as the church. Expect the participation of the Holy Spirit.

7. Make decisions by informal consensus. Avoid the restricting rules of parliamentary procedure. Examine the issue. Get all the facts and all possible response out in the open. Weigh the alternatives. And then choose by common agreement. Vote if necessary.

8. Evaluate group life and work. Provide time, especially toward the end of meetings, to reflect together on group progress, strengths, weaknesses, needs. Establish new directions for the group.

9. Use an observer. Designate one member to quietly observe the group during part of its session. Tell him what to watch for. Then hear his report later and discuss it.

10. Use a PMR. Mimeograph in advance a Post-Meeting Reaction form. Invite each member to rate the group or his own participation anonymously. Compile these, report to the group, and discuss.

Excerpts from "Handbook Council on Ministries" 1970

THE COUNCIL ON MINISTRIES

During the past few years most of our United Methodist congregations have organized for their mission in a new way. They have set up a Council on Ministries as the congregation's basic group for planning and coordinating varied ministries in response to many needs.

You may already be well acquainted with the Council on Ministries. You may have worked in one for some time, or the idea may be quite new to you. In either case, take a moment to think through the major functions of this group. What is it for, anyway?

1. Investigating: The Council on Ministries is a group that is sensitive to human need. Its members keep their eyes and ears open. They sniff out opportunities for their congregation to serve its own people, its community, and the world at large. They gather resource materials of many kinds. They probe and study. The Council as a whole coordinates this investigation by its various members and related groups.

2. Planning: Based on their understanding of the church's mission and the particular needs at hand, the Council members work out possible goals for the congregation's many ministries. They then make specific plans for achieving these goals: programs, projects, and all sorts of other actions.

3. Coordinating: The Council on Ministries develops these many ideas for action into a united program for the congregation's witness and service. It coordinates many possibilities into one whole mission.

4. Recommending: The Council does not have the last word on these proposals. It recommends coordinated goals and plans to the Administrative Board for approval. And it requests the needed funds of the Committee on Finance. However, when possible, policies and budgets will be set so as to allow the Council to move ahead without checking every item.

5. Delegating: Once plans are approved and funded, the Council delegates its various members and related groups to implement the plans.

6. Evaluating: The Council also weighs the results of these ministries in light of the original goals and reports these evaluations to the Administrative Board for further action.

Thus the Council on Ministries is responsible for the congregation's entire mission. It is the group where the basic outlines of the congregation's ministries are hammered out in an integrated way. Its members, therefore, have a most significant responsibility. Who are these people?

THE COUNCIL'S UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

The Council on Ministries is quite a different kind of group than we have ever had in the local church. Congregations are discovering that this way of organizing provides an opportunity to keep the following values in dynamic relation to each other.

1. Gospel-oriented and issue-oriented: Because the Council on Ministries studies (and helps the congregation to study) both the gospel and the current human issues, it is able to relate the one to the other. Thus the mission it helps develop is directed to those places where God's good news "intersects" with man's urgent need. It avoids both extremes: irrelevant religion and superficial social service.

2. Person-centered and mission-centered: The basic membership of the Council includes both the chairmen and various work areas in the church's mission and the age-level and family coordinators. In the creative interaction between these chairmen and coordinators, ministries can be developed in which the basic concerns of the church "connect" with the actual needs of real people.

3. Focused and whole: All the church's major concerns are represented in one planning body. Therefore, it can give

time, build them into one whole integrated program. Each individual ministry is a specially functioning "member" of the whole "body" of ministries, just as each Christian is a unique member of Christ's Body, the church.

4. Local and connectional: There is no "recommended program" for the Council on Ministries to "put on." The ministries developed will be different in each place according to the local needs and opportunities. But we still are a "connectional" church. We are all in this together, and so the Council also takes advantage of the experiences of other congregations, the training events of the district and annual conference, the resource materials of the general agencies, etc. The Council's planning is neither entirely dependent on others, nor entirely independent of them. It is interdependent with others in a new way.

5. Long-range and short-range: The Council works with the Administrative Board (and through it, with the Charge Conference) in establishing goals for the congregation's mission months or even years in advance. But it also works with specific officers and groups in laying detailed plans for implementing these goals. In this way it keeps the distant view and the present program in constant relationship.

Any one of these pairs of values can become lopsided. The Council will need to work to keep each dynamic relationship well balanced.