

## Church Leadership: A Look at Yoked Ministries and Cooperative Congregational Outreaches



Crab Run and Damascus

Friends Run and Smith  
Creek

Gordonsville and Knight's  
Chapel

(File photos)

How do smaller churches facing financial limitations supplement their congregation-led ministries with pastoral support? Six congregations in the Shenandoah District have embraced the yoked congregation model for church leadership. Yoked congregations are where two churches are splitting the cost of a paid minister. This option affords the opportunity to augment their lay ministry by hiring someone who has been called as a pastor and has had some specific training to serve in that role.

Two out of three of the yoked congregation pairings in the District share a bivocational minister, and the other has a vocational part-time pastor that they share. Two of the yoked congregation pairings are fraternal in nature, while one is a mother-daughter situation, where one church has planted the other church and shares a pastor. The fraternal congregation pairings are Friends Run and Smith Creek, and Crab Run and Damascus. The mother-daughter congregation pairing is Gordonsville and Knight's Chapel.

Although finances are the primary reason for calling one pastor to serve two congregations, there are also benefits in working together to support outreaches in their communities.

Pastor David Morris, who serves Friends Run-Smith Creek, reports that these congregations work together to support those in nursing homes. When asked by the local nursing home, Pendleton Manor, to host birthday parties on occasion, the

congregations come together to serve cake, punch, and ice cream and provide a festive atmosphere complete with balloons and gifts. These parties are held for the entire nursing home wing with people who are celebrating birthdays that month. It is a ministry that the residents of the nursing home greatly appreciate.

These two congregations also work together to provide ecumenical services for the broader community during the Lenten season by offering a meal on the first Thursday of Lent. This year, the service was held in the United Methodist Church in Franklin, West Virginia. They served soup, sandwiches, drinks and desserts, with cooperation between the congregations that prevented duplication of food choices. Friends Run and Smith Creek volunteers prepared and served the meal while Morris brought the message afterward. Morris says that these services during the Lenten season involve two United Methodist Churches, one Lutheran Church, one Presbyterian Church, one Baptist Church, and both Church of the Brethren congregations.

Pastor Terry Jewell, who serves the Gordonsville and Knight's Chapel congregations, says that Vacation Bible School is an outreach to the community that the two congregations share. He notes that either congregation would have difficulty pulling it off alone, but they have excellent resources together.

Pastor Larry Aikens, pastor of Crab Run-Damascus, also notes the cooperation between not only the two Church of the Brethren congregations in the Criders area but also three other Mennonite and Lutheran Churches in hosting a combined Vacation Bible School. They have over 100 children who attend, and they bus some of them to the Mennonite church for additional classroom space. It is a traditional, full-length Bible school from Sunday through Friday.

The pastors of these yoked congregations often cite missions and evangelism as outreach activities. Jewell says Gordonsville-Knight's Chape financially supports outreach ministries that church members have started. One of their members has a missionary organization called Stand in Faith. It is in 11 countries and has established relationships with 38 pastors. The couple running the mission sends money to each pastor to help support their church, with the stipulation that 50 percent of the money be spent on evangelism, and the number of salvation and healings that have been reported is staggering. Another family in the congregation felt led to build a stage on a gooseneck trailer that could be pulled around to hold meetings before the COVID-19 pandemic. So, when events had to be held outside due to restrictions on in-person meetings, they had the stage available and invited Christian speakers several times a month. Since things have returned to normal, they only offer one monthly event. Jewell exclaimed, "We're getting beyond the walls of the church. I'm so excited!"

Aikens noted a unique community outreach at Crab Run-Damascus. Although not technically a ministry of the church, many members of the congregations have leadership roles and support the local fair. The Bergton Fair is a wholesome, family-oriented community event that showcases good, old-fashioned fun. He noted that these leaders are providing salt and light for the entire community through the fair. "They are preserving the moral fabric for the community," Aikens observed.

A ministry all these yoked congregations share is the annual Disaster Ministries Auction in May of each year at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds. The congregations primarily send items to be sold and prepare food, but members can also be found helping to set up or volunteering to work during the auction week.

The congregations throughout the Shenandoah District are diverse in their needs and resources, as well as their mission and ministry callings. Yet, God blesses each with church leadership models that work for them. He grants them success in their outreaches, unique programming and staffing.

Next week, the discussion about the yoked congregation model of church leadership moves from joint community outreaches to taking a look at how these congregations are maintaining their individual ministries within the yoked setting.

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