

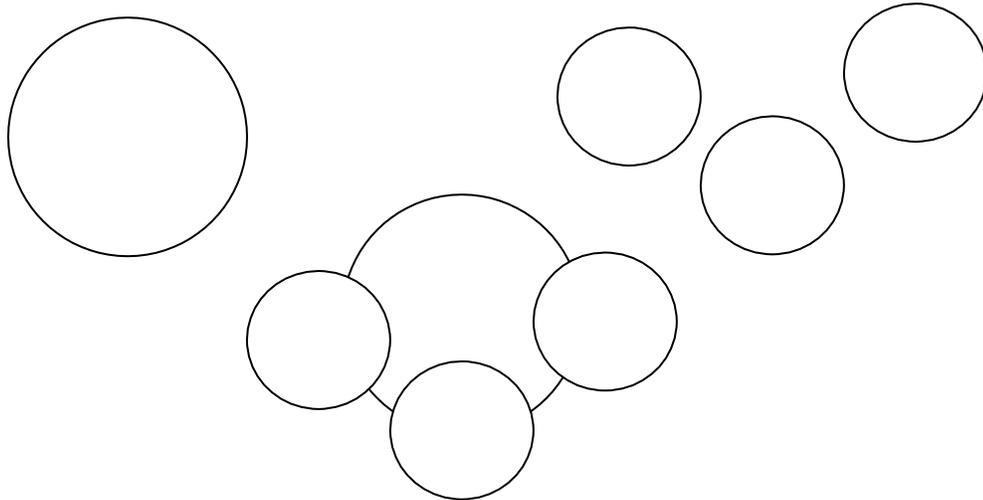
Potential Models for ELCA Synod Global Ministries

Alternative title:

**How you can set things up to accomplish all your goals,
meet everybody's expectations and keep everyone happy
– and not kill yourselves in the process!**

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Why this paper?

This paper is written for synod leaders, both lay and clergy, volunteer and staff. It is a response to their questions about how to juggle and manage all the different responsibilities involved in global ministries, and it contains some of their accumulated wisdom and experience in doing so. It focuses on just one facet of this issue: how synods have structured groups of people to work in synod global ministries, and what they've learned in the process. The goal of this compilation is for us all to learn from each other as we plan for the future.

Life has gotten complicated

First let's look at the history. When the ELCA was young, synod global ministry committees typically promoted awareness and support of churchwide global ministries. They distributed information to congregational leaders, sponsored displays at synod assemblies, and encouraged missionary sponsorship or gifts to World Hunger.

Then things got more complicated. Through the Companion Synod Program, synod committees were entrusted with the responsibility of developing relationships directly with their international companion. Over time, the size and scope of this program has grown tremendously. At first, every ELCA synod had one international companion. Now most synods have two or more, with two synods having five. Some of these relationships now involve scholarships, grants, personnel, development work and other extensive projects.

Other churchwide programs have added to this growing complexity and sophistication. In addition to the ongoing World Hunger Appeal, additional churchwide initiatives have included Stand with Africa, Peace Not Walls, HIV/AIDS campaign, and the ELCA Malaria Campaign, each one adding responsibilities for synod global ministry groups.

Further complicating matters is globalization. Now people can travel the world over and communicate in ways only imaginable 20 years ago. Due to these advances in global travel and communication, more ELCA members, congregations, and organizations have developed their own direct global engagements, digging wells and starting orphanages in places they hadn't heard about until recently. Their passion for these activities has grown to the point that they sometimes approach synod leaders to support their global engagements, or to adopt them as additional companion synod relationships.

Note that while all these levels of responsibility have been added to synods' job descriptions, nothing has been removed.

The LIFT study confirmed that there are issues

In the survey for the Living Into Our Future Together (LIFT) task force, while respondents affirmed the role of the Global Mission unit and the value of the Companion Synod Program, they also mentioned concerns about balancing churchwide, synodical, congregational and independent global ministries in a way that maintains support for broader churchwide global ministries while supporting a variety of global initiatives and coordinating their independent actions towards common goals.

Synod leaders say there is also an opportunity

Many synod leaders echo the concerns above. Sometimes they feel pressure – or a calling – to provide support in four directions: churchwide global ministries, their own companion synod relationships, global engagements of their congregations, and various independent initiatives of their members. Among other things, these concerns resulted in the adoption of a protocol Agreement between the Conference of Bishops and the Global Mission unit on companion synod relationships in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, which is guiding the development of the Companion Synod Program. At the same time, as synod leaders are encouraged to adopt the accompaniment principle of sustainability into their companion synod relationships, the question of how to establish sustainable synod global ministries is a logical next step.

Many express the hope that if we can integrate all these various global engagements, we could take advantage of an opportunity to create a rising tide that will lift all boats – especially when our boats are launched in the baptismal waters of our calling to participate in God's mission in the world.

This hope and opportunity is particularly timely at this moment in our church's history. Faced with decreased Mission Support, creating a broad awareness of our wider global ministries can be a synod's best hope to raise Mission Support, which funds both synod and churchwide ministries. People give to mission. And as the dust settles from churchwide assembly decisions on sexuality, there is a growing eagerness to recapture the hearts and minds of our people for mission in general, including global mission in particular. Synods can play a unique and pivotal role in connecting local and global mission.

But how do they keep all those plates spinning...?!?

What's the solution?

There is none!

That there's no solution should come as no surprise to Lutherans. We know there's no magic bullet or divine remedy to make the church work perfectly.

But some things can make us more effective or less stressed. How we structure and organize groups of people to do global ministries is one such thing. Granted, spending time on organizational structures may sound boring, but it can really make a difference. It's like finding the right size shoes for your feet, or organizing your kitchen or toolbox, or putting the right foundation under your house. Afterwards, things just go better.

Let's at least learn from each other

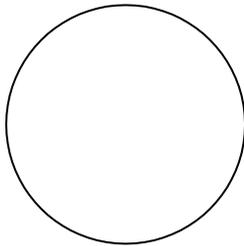
Every year, consultations are held in every ELCA region for synod leaders in global mission, world hunger, and companion synod relationships. These people have a lot of real-life experience in living with different structures for synod global ministries, so what better group to start with?

At these global gatherings in the autumn of 2010, participants were given this information:

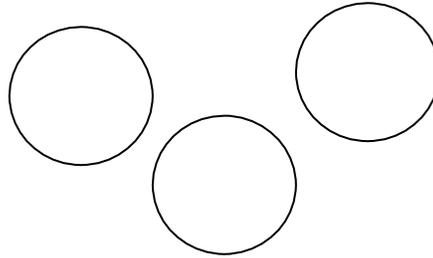
Within your synod's territory and among your synod's members, synod leaders have the responsibility for supporting global ministries that reach around the globe. This includes participation in ELCA ministries such as companion synod relationships and advocacy, and funding for churchwide global ministries such as ongoing Mission Support, World Hunger, and Missionary Sponsorships, plus specific appeals such as the Lutheran Malaria Initiative.

To accomplish this goal, synods commonly set up groups of people that include both staff and volunteers, using a wide variety of names for these groups, such as teams, tables, task forces, coordinators, networks, and committees (both standing and ad hoc). These groups tend to be organized in one or a combination of the following ways.

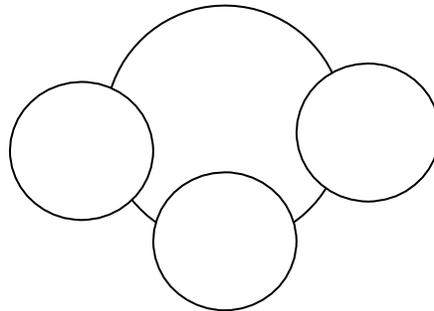
1 - Single group dealing with all these areas



2 - Separate groups dealing with separate issues



3 - Umbrella group with subgroups



Then participants in these gatherings were asked which model they were using, and, in their experience, what are the advantages and disadvantages of each model?

The purpose of the discussion which followed was to reflect on how well their own structures supported and integrated synodical, churchwide, congregational, and local global ministries, and then to share their reflections with each other for mutual learning. Finally the wisdom of these reflections would be gathered into this paper for the benefit of others across the ELCA.

We learned what we could have expected. All three models have advantages and disadvantages. None is right for every synod, nor for all time. Since global ministries and relationships are dynamic and changing, the structures supporting them will change over time as well. Many synods are in transition between one model and another. In general, as a synod's ministries became more complicated, so did the necessary structures which

support those ministries. Furthermore, many synods had unique combinations of the three models, with dotted and solid lines connecting the circles as needed. As in so many areas of life, form follows function.

The compiled comments from these rich discussions follow below. I hope you find them useful as you reflect on your own synod's structure for global ministries. After reading them, you may be content with your current structure, or you may want to tweak your structure, or you may want to explore a new model. Whatever the result, just remember that your structure needs to make sense for your synod!

Blessings to you in your synod global ministry,
Lanny Westphal, compiler

Model 1: Single group that does it all

Advantages:

- It can result in a shared vision and coordinated plan. "Everybody's at the table together." This is a significant accomplishment when you consider the wide territory and diverse membership of a synod.
- Every member of the group stays informed of what is happening through meetings and minutes.
- A single group can serve as the hub for receiving information from a variety of sources and distributing it to a number of audiences.
- A single group can focus on the big picture.
- A single group works well to build a program from the grass roots, especially when there is no synod staff or budget support.

Risks:

- All the work can fall on a few people, which can become burdensome especially as the program grows and develops.
- The work can become too dependent on one leader or a few people, increasing the possibility of making poor decisions.
- More time needs to be spent in coordination, resulting in long agendas and long meetings.
- The single group can act as a committee of the whole, useful for discussing issues but not for making decisions or implementing plans.
- A single group can over-focus on pet projects to the neglect of the whole spectrum of global ministries. "Not everything fits. Balls get dropped."
- Burnout can result as members try to do everything.
- A single group has fewer opportunities than multiple groups for volunteers to serve and for leadership to develop.
- Changes in group membership can lead to a lack of follow-up and institutional memory; "people leave and things drop."
- The group can become listless or like a wet blanket on all global ministries.

This structure works better when:

- Group members have passion for these ministries.
- Group members have a balance between different constituencies, interests, and ministries so they don't focus on one area to the exclusion of the others.
- Group members serve as "connectors" to other groups so the committee doesn't become ingrown.
- The number of group members is relatively small.
- A synod has fewer international companion relationships.

Model 2: Separate groups doing different things

Note: Some synods do not have groups of people but instead rely on individuals who serve as coordinators or volunteers who work with particular projects on an ad hoc basis.

Advantages:

- Without jumping through too many hoops, separate groups can act freely to accomplish their own unique goals and to provide opportunities for a variety of volunteers to express their ministry passions.
- Each separate group can focus its energy on a specific, clearly defined ministry area, resulting in "high ownership" for ministry areas.
- Separate groups working in different areas can lead to cross-fertilization of ideas.
- Multiple groups offer more niche opportunities for more people to get involved and for expanding the web of networks.
- Separate groups present fewer hoops to jump through and less chance of a veto for new initiatives, thus creating a more permission-giving environment that results in more energy for global ministries.
- Synod volunteers are not overwhelmed or burned out by overly large, vaguely defined, or diffuse areas of ministry, but can focus on what interests them most.

Risks:

- Separate initiatives suffer from a lack of synergy or coordination.
- It can be unclear to whom the separate groups report.
- Separate groups can become territorial over the turf of their respective programs, leading to the perception of competition for the time, money, and attention of synod members.
- The lack of a clear coordinating mechanism can create a vacuum which gives rise to more independent actions by congregations, individuals, and other organizations.
- Members of separate groups don't know what the other groups are doing, leading to a risk of duplication.
- Opportunities and important issues may "slip through the cracks" because they do not fit into the focus of one of the existing separate groups.
- Separate groups can become overly focused on their own areas, such as companion synod relationships, leading to a lack of balance in their approach. Some synods have created separate global mission groups to counterbalance the tendency to over-focus on companion synod relationships.

- A separate group can develop a life of its own without common practices or accountability to the greater mission or the wider church.
- Because each separate group depends on a few key volunteers, becoming part of such a group can feel like a "life sentence."
- Separate groups often have no budgeted funds but must find their own, leading to competing appeals.
- Each separate group has its own meeting and sponsors its own workshop; "there are not enough Saturdays!"

This structure works better when:

- A synod staff member who relates to all the separate groups as a "fence minder" to reinforce boundaries between their respective programs and ministries, so that groups don't infringe on each others' programs or turf.
- A liaison connects each separate group to the bishop or Synod Council, who provide oversight.
- Some people are members of several separate groups, acting as de facto liaisons between the groups to facilitate sharing of information.

Model 3: Umbrella group with subgroups

The umbrella group typically has oversight or a coordinating role over the subgroups. This umbrella group can be composed of representatives from all the subgroups, or it can be a separate group distinct from all the subgroups; in some cases, this umbrella function for all the subgroups can be performed by one coordinator such as a synod staff member or a Synod Council member.

Advantages:

- Provides the best of models #1 and #2, with both specific focus and a broader perspective.
- Everyone stays informed of the related activities of others, leading to more support for each other.
- More synergies are possible, in which separate activities are coordinated toward common goals.
- The committee can coordinate and rotate limited resources among the subcommittees, minimizing competition between committees and presenting a more unified program to constituencies. For example, three subcommittees can each have a turn at providing a special emphasis at Synod Assembly over a three-year cycle.
- All the related subgroups can meet simultaneously before or after meeting of the umbrella group, leading to a good use of time and greater communication and coordination between subgroups.
- Members of the umbrella group or subgroups are often eager to hear what is happening in other groups.
- It is easy to add more members to subgroups.

- This structure is flexible and easy to modify. For example, new subgroups can be created and old subgroups ended to meet evolving needs and opportunities. "It can be a launching pad for new ministries."
- This structure keeps one area from dominating the agenda of all global ministries. It results in a healthy interdependence between different areas.
- A more holistic picture of global ministries can be interpreted and communicated to synod members.
- In geographically large synods, subgroups can be in different geographic areas, thus reducing travel and meeting expenses for the synod.
- Each subgroup can focus its energy on a specific, clearly defined ministry area, so that work is constantly happening in an efficient manner.
- Subgroups working in different areas can lead to cross-fertilization of ideas.
- Multiple groups offer more niche opportunities for more people to get involved and for expanding the web of networks.

Risks:

- Meetings of the umbrella committee can last very long to allow time for all the subcommittees to report.
- Subcommittees often need to meet in between the umbrella committee meetings, resulting in yet more meetings.
- The umbrella committee has no defined role other than compiling reports and information, getting in the way of planning and creating the impression that nothing is getting done.
- It can be hard to include all the subgroups that relate to global ministry. "How many plates can you keep spinning?"
- Umbrella groups can over-control or micro-manage. Subgroups can feel that they must jump through hoops or wait a long time for permission to act.
- There is a tendency to over-focus on companion synod relationships to the neglect of other global ministries of the wider church.
- An umbrella group can generate a lot of good ideas which result in sub-groups, but then the energy and passion becomes embedded in the sub-group, leaving the umbrella group without a strong or sustainable sense of purpose.

This structure works better when:

- the umbrella group is elected and subgroups are made up of volunteers
- subgroups have their own members instead of just being assigned members of the umbrella group
- the umbrella group focuses on larger issues such as vision, guidelines, budget, and general direction, while the subgroups focus on specific tasks
- the members of the umbrella group can actively engage in oversight without either excessive vetoing, micro-managing or rubber-stamping
- the functions and parameters of the umbrella group and the subgroups are clearly defined
- subgroups know when they can act on their own initiative and when they need to seek permission

- liaisons between the umbrella group and subgroups attend both groups conscientiously and take seriously their role to act as communicators and bridge-builders
- the subgroups celebrate their accomplishments when they are together and not spend time recruiting others to their causes

Common Issues

- Balancing the whole and the parts is a critical issue. Individuals, small groups, and larger groups must all understand and fulfill their separate and common responsibilities.
- Structure must follow function. The purpose of a synod global ministry must be defined before creating a structure to support it. Things happen because of passion, ideas, and "exploding stars" not because of structure.
- Maximizing resources is critical during times of scarce budget resources. Some synods are utilizing more technology, such as skype, conference calls, web sites, and phone conference calls. One synod has suspended formal structured committees and created networks of people self-organized around common passions and ministries.
- Communication is always a critical issue. Most groups feel they could do better in communicating with the members of their synod.
- "How to break into the circle" – global ministry groups can sometimes be closed circles, gathered around previous travel experiences, global service, or shared friendships or understandings that are inaccessible to the average person without an intentional effort to welcome and orient newcomers.
- "How connected are the various global mission areas with world hunger?" It is common for the world hunger group to be separate from the global mission group(s) due to different goals and foci. Global mission often has more diverse areas to tend, while world hunger tends to be a more unified effort.
- "How to deal with outliers?" Many synods have congregations and independent organizations within their boundaries with independent initiatives in global mission and world hunger. What is the synod's role and responsibility towards them?
- Accountability is a critical issue. Some groups write a list of unfinished business items in their minutes to ensure follow-through.