



A cornerstone of love

Monitor's ministry team models mutuality

by Monica Rice

More than 15 years ago, Monitor Church of the Brethren—a rural congregation near McPherson, Kan.—made a shift.

Facing a pastoral transition in 2005, the congregation of about 70 members considered its location, financial commitments, and the gifts of congregants. Nearby Community Church of the Brethren in Hutchison had a successful model of plural ministry (as opposed to a single salaried pastor), and so Monitor spent time consulting with their congregational neighbor as they explored their own possibilities for team ministry.

Together as a congregation, Monitor chose to put in place a pastoral team. As they assessed their strengths, they realized that several active congregants were already licensed or ordained ministers in the Church of the Brethren. Those who were credentialed and interested in joining the team were invited to be part of the first pastoral team at Monitor. One long-time minister was more skeptical than others about how this would work logistically. He held off joining the team immediately, but later officially became part of it and contributed gifts of visitation and caregiving as his primary form of engagement.

In early March, during a conversation over tea, the five current members of this passionate and creative pastoral team highlighted how much they appreciate that each of them can share his or her strengths with the congregation. Leslie Frye, one of the founding team members, said that much of the time a strength one teammate is lacking is a strength that another holds. This was expressed strongly in



courtesy of Monitor Church of the Brethren

a statement that no one pastor has “the weight of all responsibility for everything.” It allows for creativity and for each member of the team to participate in ministry in a variety of ways.

The team is intentionally structured to model the Brethren value of the priesthood of all believers. Instead of highlighting a lead pastor with others in supporting roles, all ministers engage in ministry equally, though not uniformly.

This created one of the only major concerns at the time of establishing the team. There were questions about who to call when needs arose and who would take responsibility for congregational decisions. The 2005 proposal to establish team ministry included a decision to highlight a “Team Contact Pastor” who would be available to field calls for pastoral care needs, administrative needs, and convene the team for regular meetings. What has actually happened through the years is that most ministry decisions have happened organically, and congregants call on the team member they are most comfortable with when seeking pastoral care.

None of the founding pastors could have anticipated the

Current team members are John Hoffman, Joshua Leck, Leslie Frye, Connie Burkholder, and (not pictured) Shana Leck.



courtesy of Monitor Church of the Brethren

challenges that arose in their personal lives after establishing the team. For a period of time, multiple team members or their spouses were experiencing grief from personal loss or unique and extreme health concerns simultaneously.

Connie Burkholder, who moved to central Kansas in 2007 and connected with the congregation for several years before joining the pastoral team, recounted that for a bit of time she was ministering to all of the other team members along with the congregation because each was facing a personal challenge. The most public of those challenges was when team member John Hoffman received a kidney transplant from fellow congregant Shana Leck. Shana's husband, Joshua Leck, was already a part of the team during the operation, and Shana herself was recently welcomed onto the team after her licensing this past March.

Hoffman reflected on the challenges that have come, both personal and congregational issues. "The church is kind of like a marriage," Hoffman said. "You come together because you love one another, but it is not always perfect."

One of the challenges the whole team agreed on is that they have found it difficult to find a regular time to meet over the years. This is due to busy schedules, but also is a tribute to the fact that often their ministry team structure works quite seamlessly, and so they don't feel the need for a lot of pastoral team meetings.


Another topic that receives little attention is compensation. While the cost of a paid lead pastor was a factor in the initial decision to move to team ministry, payment and compensation don't drive the decisions by any individual

pastor or by the congregation as a whole. Burkholder said that a pulpit supply stipend is given for each service if that pastor requests it, but some team members choose not to be paid. The congregation also covers mileage for church-related travel and expenses for conferences or continuing education, as requested.

"And here's what I've heard and witnessed," Burkholder said: "Not having a salaried pastor has allowed Monitor to do well in budgeting outreach ministries!"

Even while acknowledging some challenges, the team is overwhelmingly positive and grateful for their ministry model. They celebrated the strong deacon group at Monitor, making it easier to care for pastoral needs. A variety of voices are present in worship with multiple pastors and lay ministers sharing the message, and other congregants sharing responsibility for worship leadership.

The team's reflections returned several times to the sentiment that each pastor is able to share their own gifts while allowing others to express their unique gifts, too. One pastor said it this way: "I feel responsible to the team and the church, but also at ease because someone else is handling things." This mutuality is a cornerstone for the team model's success at Monitor.

Ultimately, everything circles back to the bond of love among the team and the congregation. Hoffman summed it up simply: "I just love the Monitor Church. Period." The evidence of that love shows itself in many years of a thriving church body sharing joys and sorrows and challenges and triumphs, and living in the bond of love as they continue in ministry together. 

Monica Rice is director of alumni and constituent relations at McPherson (Kan.) College and recently began attending Monitor Church of the Brethren.

Western Plains district executive Sonja Griffith officiates at the licensing service for Shana Leck held earlier this year.



courtesy of Monitor Church of the Brethren