

Trinity Church Gladstone  
Case Study  
*as excerpted from —*

**ALTERNATIVES IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION:  
AN EXAMINATION OF THE CHARACTERISTICS AND OUTCOMES OF  
DENOMINATIONAL JUDICATORY STUDY PROGRAMS WHICH PREPARE  
PERSONS FOR COMMISSIONED, LICENSED, ORDAINED OR OTHERWISE  
AUTHORIZED MINISTRIES**

**A Report to the Lilly Endowment, Inc.  
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### **Trinity Episcopal Church, Gladstone, Michigan**

Gladstone, Michigan is a town of 4600 people on the Lake Michigan side of the Upper Peninsula. It is a quiet, tidy family town, attractive for its recreational and retirement resources. Gladstone was first settled in 1877 and named Sanders Point. It was incorporated ten years later and named for the British statesman William Ewart Gladstone in hopes of attracting investment financing from England. Its founders dreamed of it becoming the Chicago of the north because of rail and shipping connections. Today, Mead Paper is its main industry and primary employer. The city lost seven hundred jobs when Harnishfeger Corporation, a heavy equipment manufacturer, closed in 1983. Many local people work in Escanaba, about eight miles south, which has the advantage of greater economic development and manufacturing. The median family income of \$30,000 for the city is about twenty percent lower than that of the state of Michigan but, in spite of that, poverty statistics are slightly lower than the average for the state. Brian Horst, the city manager, takes some pride in recent economic and social development in the city. City finances have stabilized and a new eighteen million dollar high school is being built on a fairly large campus in the newer section of town. His

concerns include the needs for transition housing for poorer singles and for older people and needs for activities for children and young people.



"Each generation of ministry development is to widen the leadership. People continue to grow. In time they are ready for new roles and ways to express their gifts."  
Member, ministry support team.

There are fourteen churches in Gladstone, including three Baptist, two Catholic, Church of God, Evangelical Free, Evangelical Covenant, E.L.C.A., Evangelical Lutheran, Free Methodist, United Methodist, Reorganized LDS, and Trinity Episcopal.

Trinity, with a membership under one hundred, like many churches in the Upper Peninsula, struggled for years to provide pastoral leadership, depending on lay readers or new seminary graduates who would come for one or two years. During this period of its history the church was categorized as a mission church. When the Mutual Ministry program was initiated, they were among the first to participate. At the time of our visit they were in the third generation of formation for the ministries of the church. Three

"There was this business about a circle. [Bishop] Tom Ray would draw a wheel with spokes. The hub is Jesus. The spokes are the ministries of the church. All of the ministries are of equal importance and value." Ellen Jensen, Ordained priest and preacher, retired school teacher.

priests, two deacons, preachers, teachers, musicians, and others have been commissioned or

ordained for local ministries, forming a ministry support team charged with developing the ministries of all the people. They are no longer designated as a mission church.

When visiting the church one can feel the vitality and excitement about ministry among the people of this congregation. When they get together to talk about their church they

talk about ecclesiology—the ministries of the baptized and what it means to be the church. It is apparent that although financial constraints may have provided the occasion for their participation in the Mutual Ministry program of the Diocese of Northern Michigan, it is empowerment through discernment, call, and formation education that stimulates the renewal and ongoing enthusiasm within this church. While a few members will express their preference for a rector in the role of leadership, most of the people say that even if they could afford it they would never go back to the old model. Their reasons include:

- “We have watched people come alive in faith, in their gifts. There is real power in knowing that the church went through the discernment process. God is in that process and people are called by the church.”
- “I have become aware of the gifts of others in ways I had not before.”
  - “We are working together, not owning, no turf wars. It is a collegial partnership.”
  - “People not called have grown also. Everybody is so much more alive.”
  - “We have excellent homilies here. I don’t want to hear the same person every Sunday.”
  - “The names of the congregation are drawn and every one is prayed for daily.”

“To be called and affirmed within the family of the church and to be able to explain our process of mutual ministry is a great joy.”  
 Maria Maniache,  
 Deacon/union officer at Mead Paper.

Member responses to the question of what changes they see as a result of mutual ministry in their congregation include: “sharing responsibility”, “life giving”, “family worship enhanced”, “togetherness”, “affirming”, “exciting”, “liberating”, “affirming your baptism”, “team model”, “people and congregational enrichment”, “personal and corporate growth”, “unity”, “baptismal ministry recognized”, “supportive”, “empowerment”, “seeing gifts in people differently”, “a change in the image of God” (women at the altar), and “the opportunity for regular Eucharist”. One person summarized: “Because of Mutual Ministry the congregation becomes more of a learning community, not institutionalized in the priest.”

"The first Sunday I came was a Sunday in June. . . . There were few people and no children. They all sat on the end of the pews, in separate pews. It was very private. I didn't take the Eucharist. I wasn't invited."  
Carol Clark, Mutual Ministry ordained priest and preacher, retired nurse, on her first impression of Trinity before the initiation of Mutual Ministry.

The service was led by commissioned and ordained graduates of the Mutual Ministry Program, members of the congregation. It was an inspiring service in which the Word was preached [quite well], the Eucharist was celebrated, and the people sang and prayed and passed the Peace.  
Ed Martin, from field notes, December 6, 1998.

When asked what they saw as problems in the mutual ministry model, respondents generally were hard-pressed to come up with issues that were not manageable. They say that initially it was sometimes difficult to know who was "in charge". Finances are still a struggle, but they are much better than before. There have been a few people alienated by the discernment process, but all-in-all members consider that problems are far fewer and less daunting than before they initiated the model.

The local E.L.C.A. pastor, Jonathan Schmidt says that it took some time for him to figure out what was going on at Trinity, to realize what their model of ministry is. In his two years in Gladstone, however, he has come to appreciate the high quality of ministry and public leadership of the Trinity congregation. He notes that whenever the local clergy gather there is always a strong Episcopal presence.

Among the programs and congregations that we visited Northern Michigan has been the most theologically intentional about structuring their judicatory-based programs. They think of their approach as formation rather than training or education. They have laid a strong ecclesiological foundation for what they consider to be a paradigmatic change in the understanding and practice of ministry, basing that understanding and practice in a theology of the ministry of the baptized.

Bishop Jim Kelsey , who succeeded Tom Ray in 1999, says that the Mutual Ministry model is not just an avenue for a cheap priests, but a means for the whole community to take on ministry. The role of the Canon IX priest is quite different from a seminary-trained priest. Our goal is to have more than one person in a congregation that is Canon IX and more than one permanent deacon. Because there is no priest in charge the ministry expectation is mutual. In this understanding of ministry, missionaries are catalysts, seminary-trained but not necessarily ordained. . . . We will continue to need seminary-trained leadership but will require a changed seminary curriculum. Whereas, seminary-trained leadership has been involved in the role of ministry delivery, in mutual ministry it is shifting to ministry development.

Our experience with Trinity Church confirms that their outcomes match their vision and result in significant congregational revitalization. Conversations with members of other Mutual Ministry congregations in Northern Michigan suggest that Trinity is not a lone example of success but is an illustration of what is happening across the Diocese of Northern Michigan in churches that choose to participate in the Mutual Ministry program.

"I came away convinced that a lens is being ground in Northern Michigan which could throw critical questions ~ questions about church structure, questions about the very nature of ordained ministry -- into new and sharper focus. Out of the praxis of which were oppressed communities within the church, a theology of ministerial liberation is emerging. . . . what is happening at Trinity is more than the blossoming of "lay ministry" or the establishment of 'team ministry,' and certainly far more than the ordination of local priests. What is underway and often overlooked by those outside --is a radical transformation of consciousness about what it means to be church." From "Liberating the Baptized, Shared Ministry In Northern Michigan" by Marianne Arbogast *The Witness*, August/September 1994, pp 8-10