

NCC Volunteer Lay Pastor Program

An Engage Your Calling Initiative: *The TEAMS Model*



I. Rationale

The rationale for this project is best summarized in the North American Division policy entitled, “Guidelines for Volunteer Lay Pastors”. The policy states succinctly the missional focus of a volunteer lay pastor program:

In order to fulfill the North American Division (NAD) goal of planting new churches, additional personnel is needed and that can be partially met by using volunteers to assist regular pastoral teams. Additionally, due to the trend of assigning more churches to conference-employed pastors, volunteer lay pastors can perform a valuable service to the churches in NAD.¹

The Northern California Conference is not immune to the trends mentioned in the NAD Policy cited above. In recent years we have experienced: lack of resources, personnel, smaller churches and the prospect of changing giving patterns portending more of a decline in finances in the future. Besides these issues, the Northern California Conference also believes in the Priesthood of all believers, the historical role of the clergy as primarily church planters, and that the time has come to enter into a work of compassionately reaching a harvest that has largely been untouched. In order to do so, the allocation of resources must be revisited and adjustments made. As these adjustments are made, the intention is to provide leadership development and resources to our members in areas where a pastor can no longer be supported financially. Such a leadership development program has the hope that this support system will equip the membership of these local areas to continue the work in their context, while enabling the Conference to lay plans to continue to move forward into un-entered areas. Such is in line with the commission of our Lord (see Matthew 28), the purpose of our worldwide proclamation (see Revelation 14:6-12), and the counsel we have received from Ellen White when she said:

“The work of God in the earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers” (*Gospel Workers*, pp. 351-352).

What model will be employed to finish the work that God would have us to do in each of our respective areas? Jesus appointed 12 disciples (Matthew 10), sent them out “two by two” (Mark 6:7-13), and one can

¹ Adapted from the NAD policy entitled, “North American Division Guidelines for Volunteer Lay Pastors,” voted on October 31, 2017 which is available online here: <http://www.nadministerial.com/volunteer-lay-pastor/>

easily read about the results of such team ministry (see Mark 6:12-13)! Luke 9:1-6 and verse 12 give us yet another account of the sending out of the Twelve. In Luke 9:6 the tasks accomplished by Jesus' disciples is recorded as, "they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing everywhere". Then, later on in the chapter, these disciples are referred to as "apostles" (Luke 9:10), yet they then fulfill the role of "servants" / deacons as the text progresses by helping with the food distribution (9:12-17). As followers of Jesus, they fulfilled all three roles at one time or another: Sent Disciple, Apostle, and servant. Jesus later gives the "Great Commission" to ALL of His followers in Matthew 28, and they began fulfilling this in the book of Acts. The practice of working together as a group is clearly evidenced at Pentecost (see Acts 1-3) and the methodology accompanying the work from that point on seems clear: they continued laboring as teams whether they were nurturing the house churches, planting churches or attending to the physical needs of believers. In short, this project will foster teamwork because such a model was evidenced by God at the Creation of the world and onward (see Genesis 1:26).² What follows is an outline of the goals, phases and possible outcomes (Lord willing) as the program is implemented over a five year period.

II. Volunteer Lay Pastor (VLP) program Mission, Vision and Proficiency Goals

- A. **Mission:** To establish a conference-wide leadership development program for volunteer lay pastors and a support system for them in order to preserve the longevity of their ministry.
- B. **Vision:** In various parts of the Conference there will be volunteer lay pastors, lay pastor assistants and trained local members uniting together in powerful ministry to accomplish their God-revealed mission to their communities. As these teams of ministers accomplish their mission, there will be ownership of ministry and effective outreach to their local communities. We also foresee that resources will also become available to develop the work in un-entered areas of the NCC resulting in church planting and other methodologies to reach the harvest in our territory.
- C. **Proficiency Goals:** The Northern California Conference VLP program will focus on several areas of proficiency that were highlighted by Swanson (2003)³ and cited in Wibberding's dissertation on a lay pastor training curriculum that was utilized by the Pennsylvania Conference (2010).⁴ According to these two sources, proficiency should include:
 1. Practicing the spiritual disciplines of personal prayer and devotional Bible study
 2. Training members for service within the congregation and for participation in the outreach program
 3. Involving members in church-growth activities
 4. Sermon preparation
 5. Strategic planning and visioning
 6. Ministry to children and youth
 7. Pastoral care of sick and infirmed members.
- D. The seven areas will be condensed to five, as was also done in Pennsylvania who made changes to the program after the implementation of Wibberding's project.⁵ We will do similarly and use an easy to remember acronym: TEAMS. TEAMS stands for:
 1. T - Teaching/Preaching (corresponds with the aforementioned list number 4)

² For a more detailed outline of the Theological reasons for implementing a team approach to local church leadership and outreach, please see the website www.ministryteams.org and click on the "Theological Foundation" page.

³ Swanson's article can be found online here: <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2003/04/taming-the-tyranny-of-too-much.html> (retrieved on 8/29/19). There was also an earlier article by Roger Dudley and Swanson that cites a large study done on the "Anglo" work and what qualities made for effective pastors. They found seven factors. The article can be found here: <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2000/12/what-makes-a-pastor-effective>.

⁴ Wibberding's dissertation can be found online here:

<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1147&context=dmin>

⁵ See the current Pennsylvania Conference training offerings here: <https://paconference.org/ministerial/lay-leadership-training/lay-leadership-training-curriculum/>

2. E – Evangelism (numbers 2 & 3)
3. A – Administration (number 5)
4. M – Member Care (numbers 2, 6 & 7)
5. S – Spirituality of the leader (the foundation and #1 for Swanson/Wibberding)
*The TEAMS proficiency areas will be adapted to church-wide training segments so that the whole church can be equipped to support their lay leaders.

III. Phases of the Program

A. Pre-Work: Clarification of paid Pastor, VLP, local elder and member roles

1. **The Coordinator and Pastors:** Clergy train, equip and mentor VLPs & members to do ministry. The Coordinator facilitates the accomplishment of the “Outcomes and 5 Year Goals” outlined below plus the 6th year of evaluation before proceeding. Mentoring Pastors assist with part of this process.
2. **VLP Candidate** – An applicant who has been approved by the Church Board and the NCC Placement Committee to go through the process of certification.
3. **Certified VLPs:** Individuals who have completed the VLP training and gone through the NCC process for certification/licensing. VLPs are to do ministry in an assigned context, assist pastors with assigned areas of ministry or accompanying them for ministry matters. VLPs work within the roles established by NAD policy.⁶
4. **Members:** Elders and members receive training in order to assist Pastors and VLPs by doing ministry. Members can also partner with VLPs by becoming VLPAs (Volunteer Lay Pastor Assistants) if they are selected by the VLP candidate to accompany them to the training modules. VLPAs are required to go through a local church approval process prior to being officially recognized by that Body. They attend the VLP trainings in order to familiarize themselves with the work of their ministry partner. There is no certification and no reimbursement available to VLPAs but they do need to be approved officially by the local church and undergo the NCC approved background check.

B. Phase One Goals (Years 1-2)

- **Year 1** – The Coordinator will organize spiritual and educational preparation of the ministry context including:
 - a. Working with churches to establish interim process for handling visitation, Boards, Prayer meetings, planning, etc.
 - b. Establishing an initial prayer focus and convocation schedule so churches can be praying for God’s guidance.
 - c. Contacting Elders weekly during transition period
 - d. Developing a monthly sermon/discussion DVD to send to each church
 - e. Recruiting ministry mentors (see syllabus for mentor guidelines) for Volunteer Lay Pastors (VLPs) and ask VLP candidates to choose a ministry partner to accompany them to the trainings.

⁶ See the VLP Role Description by going to www.ministryteams.com and clicking on the “Leader Readiness” tab. You will find this document there.

- f. Training of VLP and include training for VLPAs (ministry partners) to assist VLPs. These ministry partners must be approved by the respective Church Board, sign a *Volunteer Service Agreement* and undergo the NCC approved background check.
 - g. Contacting VLPs candidates weekly
 - h. Contacting VLPA candidates monthly or quarterly.
 - i. Conducting at least quarterly MTC (Ministry Training Center) ministry development courses for elders and members that equips them to assist VLPs and VLPAs.
 - j. Begin planning an annual spiritual/prayer retreat and regional convocations. The annual retreat can also provide hours of continuing education in subsequent years that can be used towards the 20 hours needed each year to maintain certification.
 - k. Working with VLPs to have personal and corporate annual plans (submitted each Fall to the Coordinator).
 - l. Coaching VLPs on utilization of *10 Days of Prayer* materials and how to conduct a prayer service each January.
 - m. Emphasizing continuing education for current VLPs that are assisting at other NCC Churches. Put a process in place for them to work with their Pastor for continuing education accountability. If they wish to be certified, then they will follow the necessary process.
 - n. Conducting a VLP self-evaluation and local church evaluation of the VLP.
 - o. Keeping a Lay Pastor profile for each VLP with copies of their evaluations, and certifications.
 - p. Providing an annual report to NCC Administration and adapt the program as needed.
 - q. **At the conclusion** of the year one coursework and practicum assignments: A VLP candidate will graduate and receive a Volunteer Lay Pastor certificate. This will be recommended by the Pastoral Placement Committee to the Executive Committee in conjunction with local Church approval.
- **Year 2** – Continue VLP, VLPA and MTC development courses with an emphasis on visioning, strategic planning and Church Growth with some resources on preaching (the 5 courses will focus on these areas).
 - a. VLPs that complete year two training will be re-certified.
 - b. Churches and the VLP will be surveyed in order to evaluate the program.
 - c. Adjustments will be made to the program by the Coordinator as needed.
 - d. Training VLPs to conduct a yearly MTC development course using various curriculum options or topics.

***If needed:** The Coordinator will conduct a Ministry Assistance Plan (MAP) for devitalized churches.

C. Phase 2 Goals (Years 3-4)

- **Year 3** – Continue VLP program with an emphasis on assessment plus utilization of technology for ministry.

- **Year 4** – Continue VLP program and continuing education for VLPs and VLPAs. Facilitate or organize trainings for local churches.

D. Phase 3 Goals (Years 5-6)

- **Year 5** – Continue yearly process that has been established in prior years. Concurrent with this main goal will be to conduct or facilitate the conducting of assessments and the preparation of a five-year report on the merits of the program to be presented to NCC Administration. Assessment and Measurements (A&M) report will include:
 - a. NCC / NCD or other survey results after 5 years
 - b. Attendance/Membership/Accession gains
 - c. Tithes decline/continuance/growth
 - d. Evaluation of VLPs by congregations
 - e. Congregational assessment of overall satisfaction and/or suggested adjustments to the VLP program.
 - f. Survey results of the Coordinator evaluation. This tool will utilize the job description and goals of the position as indicators of effectiveness.
 - h. Annual reports
- **Year 6** – Continue yearly process and adapt as needed. The Coordinator may utilize a Sabbatical to reflect and review for the coming term (if applicable).

IV. Conclusion

The above plan is a “Lord willing” plan (see James 4:13-17). If He wills, we will do as outlined above and make adjustments as they are brought to our attention. Truly, any plan needs to be laid at the feet of the Savior who gave us this great CO-mission of taking the Gospel to the world, and as we trust Him, He will direct our steps (Proverbs 3:5-6). May He lead and direct as this TEAMS approach to ministry launches and as it is implemented. May it help in providing more laborers for the harvest and help usher in the soon-return of Jesus!