

A WORKING DEFINITION OF “PARISH” AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

For the Cooperative Ministry Task Force by Don Nations

A working definition: A parish consists of the people groups and communities significantly impacted by the ministries of a particular pastor, church staff, church (congregation) or churches. These people groups and/or communities are their intentional focus of ministry and are so identified for the purpose of increasing the number of disciples of Jesus in a manner that is loving, just and inclusive.

Implications of the working definition:

1. Two churches next to each other could serve two different parishes if the focus of their ministries differed substantially.
2. Neighboring churches can (should) be viewed as serving in cooperation instead of being in competition.
3. Churches that share a common focus of ministry may best be served by working together in a cooperative parish setting – even if they are not geographically contiguous.
4. The question could plausibly be asked, “How many churches lack a clear ministry focus and an impact on their community and, hence, are not really functioning as a parish?”
5. If a church (or a group of churches) is not a parish due to a lack of an identified ministry focus and an intentional outreach effort, should they receive the appointment of a full-time Elder? If not, what kind of appointment would be most appropriate?
6. Clergy and laity will need to be trained in how to identify a ministry focus and engage it in a manner consistent with Christian stewardship and integrity.
7. “The world is my parish” would be seen as a clarion call to live out ministry in such a way (and with incredible vitality) that the impact of the ministry of a pastor, church staff, church or churches is felt around the world as transformed people encounter others, lead them into a transformative experience with Jesus and they repeat the process over and over again.
8. Churches will not be “clones” of each other due to the embracing of differing ministry foci. Each church could become more different in the particulars of its ministry yet more similar in the commitment to be a vibrant faith community.
9. The making of appointments could be impacted as it will become ever more important to match the skills and ministry focus of pastors with that of the faith congregation to which they are assigned.
10. The current guideline of not starting a new faith community within five miles of an existing United Methodist church is shown to be an old wineskin. If the focus of ministry of the new faith community is significantly different from that of the nearby existing church, then there are few valid reasons to retain the current guideline.