

A church seeks wholeness in its mission and, in so doing, has a variety of programs to achieve it. As the human body needs to coordinate its parts in order to accomplish tasks, so parts of the church must be coordinated to achieve the tasks of mission.

## History and Background

The word **program** means to **write before**, to plan and schedule. A program in the local church means any activity that plans to bring people together for companionship, learning, sharing, worship and service. The word **coordinate** means **meshing and bringing harmony**. It is relating separate activities to one another in ways that are productive for all. Program coordination provides harmonious order to what is being planned and assures that it continues as planned while programs are underway.

## Common Practices

Program coordination may be carried out by some form of coordinating council, the pastor or other people formally given the task of coordination. At times, no one formally has the responsibility to see that it happens, but someone does it because of a personal concern. In many churches, the pastor is, for all practical purposes, the only regular program coordinator. She or he tries

to keep all things recorded on the calendar and schedule and to keep the total in some state of workable balance.

Some churches are like the one where the church school superintendent was asked to attend a meeting hastily called by the church school teachers. They were upset because people were scheduling other activities for their students during the church school hour. Here was a problem of coordination, where well-intended people were over-scheduling the youth. If some way had been established to avoid the problem, feelings probably would not have been hurt, and there would have been no cause for misunderstanding.

## Things to Consider in Coordination

Whoever is responsible for coordination needs to keep in mind all the items to be coordinated. There needs to be some way to indicate who wants them and when. A policy should be set up to decide what happens if more than one group asks for the same thing at the same time.

- **Facilities.** This includes the church building and grounds, especially kitchens and large rooms. Consider not just which rooms are scheduled, but whether groups will get in each other's way even if they aren't using the same rooms.
- **Equipment.** Things such as video tape players, tables, chairs and

easels are vital to certain programs.

- **Supplies.** There are certain materials that everyone takes for granted: paper, newsprint, cleaning materials, paper towels and dishes. Especially when extra materials are needed, it helps to be able to plan on them.
- **Staff support.** Some programs require the support, even if only by attendance, of the pastor or other members of the staff, and that needs to be planned.
- **Office support.** Frequently committees, boards and groups depend on the church office to duplicate materials, mail reports, type lists and provide other office support.

There are a number of concerns or issues to look for in program coordination. They include:

- **Under-programming.** Even with a number of programs, your church may not be programming for everyone. Care needs to be given so that all kinds of people will have their needs met by the church and will be able to carry out personal ministries through church programs.
- **Over-programming.** There are times when there are simply more things going on than church members can use or support. Coordination helps the church balance the need for variety with the need not to over-program.
- **Duplication of effort.** Sometimes more than one group is planning programs with the same focus or

outcome. Coordination will help them discover ways they can work together or plan ways not to overlap.

- **Sequence of effort.** Someone needs to be aware of the overall schedule of events so that things that have a natural sequence may take place in that order. For instance, they can make certain that the women's organization has its last meeting for the year before the work group gathers to renovate their meeting room.
- **Special emphasis.** Sometimes the church takes on a special emphasis with stated strategies during a specified time, such as membership growth or community outreach. Effort may need to be made to involve each group in the church in the emphasis.

There are several ways to coordinate:

- **Overall assessment.** Coordination focuses on seeing the whole. Are there any gaps? Do all the plans together address the church's whole mission, or, if all were carried out, would the church still feel it hadn't accomplished its goals for the year?
- **Communication.** Coordination lets the left hand know what the right hand is doing. People in one group find out what another group has planned and then can make their plans.
- **Monitoring.** After plans have been implemented, things never go quite the way they were expected to go. Changes need to be noted and the people they affect need to be

informed of the change. Occasionally, when things are really bogged down, a helping hand can be offered.

- **Evaluation of the whole.** At the end of the program year or a special emphasis, each group or part of the church may evaluate how it did. A group responsible for program coordination can evaluate how the church as a whole has done.

## Skills and Attributes Needed

- Solid theological grounding.
- Understanding of and commitment to the mission of the church.
- Patience.
- Ability to communicate with people.
- Familiarity with the planning process.
- Tact.

## Responsibilities

To increase the church's capacity to coordinate all its programming, someone or some unit of the church needs to be delegated the responsibility for overall coordination. Make it clear who is responsible (pastor, staff, governing board or subgroup of it, an elected or appointed group) and to whom they are accountable. Then let others in the church know to cooperate in the coordination. People

in charge of coordination are responsible for:

- Finding ways to assess what is being planned and the needs it generates by using a calendar and mapping out the program year.
- Asking each group or organization to supply the following information:
  - Date of planned activity.
  - Sponsored group.
  - Who is invited?
  - Subject.
  - Program support needs (facility, equipment, general supplies, staff, office).
- Reviewing the information and assessing for:
  - Being able to meet the program support needs.
  - Over-programming, duplication of effort or under-programming.
  - Sequence of effort.
  - Attention to special emphasis, if there is one.
  - The church's total mission.
  - Stepping in and raising scheduling questions, calling attention to gaps, over-or under-programming or any other concerns that arise out of the review.
- Discovering ways to stay in touch with what is happening; monitoring change and enhancing communication while letting people feel you are supportive of their work. You can have informal and periodic conversations with chairpersons or other program leaders individually or together.

Ask: "How are things going?" "Are there any changes in your plans?"

"Is there something we or others could do to be helpful?"

- Avoid making coordination the most important thing going on. It is the servant of faithful, harmonious order. You may be tempted to overdo the coordination effort. Be reasonable in what you request.
- Keeping in mind that people are helped if they can see the overall picture. Monthly calendars or other methods you can devise will help.
- Reporting what the overall program of your church achieves at the end of the program period.
- Planning what you will attempt to coordinate and how you will go about it. Assess how it is working and what modifications are needed in the coordination effort.

## Issues Facing the Church

- Smaller membership churches run the risk of over-programming, especially when they use a model developed by a larger church. Yet, not all people in these churches are the same. Can these churches do programming jointly with other churches or in other ways balance these needs?
- Churches often program things that are comfortable, while the gospel raises questions about things that are uncomfortable. How can the coordinators raise questions about

the full scope of the church's mission?

- Sometimes we are so busy planning bigger and better programs that it gets in the way of God's reaching us. How can you balance planning programs with openness to God?

## Questions

- Who is responsible for program coordination in your church? What are the strengths and limitations you would want to keep in mind when further developing or changing the present effort?
- How is program coordination different from program development? From control of program?