

Cooperative Fellowship

“Voluntary” does not mean “optional,” and “volunteer” does not mean “second-class”—quite the opposite.

Voluntary means willingly. It’s right there in the word itself. The root of the word “voluntary” is the Latin word “volo,” which means an act of the will. In fact, the English word “will” is the Latin word “volo” transmitted through time. The Latin “volo” becomes the Old Norse “vila,” which becomes the Old English “wela,” which becomes the modern English “will.” If we were to de-Latinize the word “voluntary,” it would become the word “willantary” because it’s something you do as a sheer act of will.

The term “volunteer” actually has a military origin and was used to describe a type of soldier. You see, there are three types of soldiers in times of war.

The first is the conscript. This is a soldier who has been forced to fight against their will. In terms of quality, the conscript is the worst of all possible soldiers. They don’t want to be there, and they don’t want to fight. In fact, they will only fight as long as they are more afraid of their commanders than they are of the enemy. As soon as they get an opportunity to quit and run away, they will take it.

The second type of soldier is the mercenary. This is a soldier who will fight as long as they get paid. They are far more effective than the conscript because the conscript is only motivated by fear, while the mercenary is motivated by greed. The mercenary will fight and fight hard – as long as they are winning. However, the mercenary knows that dead men collect no paychecks, so if the tide of battle turns against them, they will run away just as fast as the conscript.

The third type of soldier is the volunteer. These are the military elites and the most deadly soldiers there are. They fight as a sheer act of their will and are willing to lay their lives down because they believe in the cause. While other soldiers will run away when the chips are down, volunteers will fight with everything they have right to the bitter end.

Why is this significant?

It is significant because The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada is a *voluntary cooperative fellowship*, and knowing what that means affects everything.

First, we are voluntary – we are here as a sheer act of the will. Nobody forced me to join this team. I came here willingly because I believe in the cause. What did I willingly sign up for? To join a voluntary cooperative fellowship – which literally means that I have willingly decided to cooperate and fellowship with other pastors, churches, and congregants to follow Jesus as we advance the cause of the Gospel. If I had no intention of living the life of a married man, then I shouldn’t have stood at that altar and said, “I do.” If I had no intention of voluntarily cooperating and fellowshipping with other pastors and churches, it was a pretty stupid idea to join a voluntary cooperative fellowship.

Second, is that we cooperate. This is a sacrifice of time, money, and resources to coordinate our efforts in advancing the Gospel. This means that I will be a contributor, not a consumer. I will give more than I take, and I will lead others to do the same. This means that any church I pastor will financially support the district, church planters, and missionaries. And, if the right opportunity comes along, I will also invest in other congregations. I will coordinate efforts, training, and resources with other pastors and churches. Anything I learn – I share.

Third, is we fellowship. This means I will invest in relationships outside of my congregation with other pastors, leaders, and churches. We’ve all met those

lone-ranger wing-nut Christians who don't think they need to be a part of the church. Their error is that they rebel against the teaching of Scripture that "the eye cannot say to the hand 'I don't need you'" and instead have contempt for the body of Christ – they learn from no one, they support no one, and they answer to no one. Unfortunately, sometimes these lone rangers get jobs as pastors and continue to show contempt for the body of Christ and lead their churches learning from no one, supporting no one, and answering to no one.

Not me.

I will treat my co-labourers in Christ as friends. I will celebrate their wins, and I will give comfort and support when they face hard times. This will cost me time and effort, but my family in Christ is worth it.

In the end, I didn't join an optional cooperative fellowship but a voluntary cooperative fellowship. And because that's what I signed up for – that's what I'm going to do. I believe in the cause and will lay my life down for it. And should the day come when I am unable or unwilling to voluntarily cooperate and fellowship, then I hope I have the integrity to do the honourable thing.



John Albiston
Effectiveness Coach

Better Together

"We are a cooperative Fellowship, and our relationships are marked by mutual trust, value, and respect for one another. We are church leaders who work interdependently, as one team." - Rev. Dr. David R. Wells, General Superintendent, The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.

OUR COOPERATIVE FELLOWSHIP

The General Superintendent of the PAOC describes the governance of the Fellowship as a forceful, life-giving river running between two banks. This is a powerful image. Riverbanks have been identified as vitally important and valuable, providing great significance to the rivers and communities they support. One of the riverbanks in this picture of governance for the PAOC is the cooperative Fellowship that is enjoyed by the participating churches affiliated with the PAOC.

As a cooperative Fellowship of 1,100 churches in Canada, our sustaining relationship is vital. We need the strength of other disciple-making communities standing around us, helping us maintain healthy, functioning churches. We operate at our best in relationships with other local, district, national and international leaders doing ministry alongside us. We accomplish greater things for God's kingdom when we are connected as a Fellowship, guided by a shared mission.

To be cooperative demands mutual trust, value, and respect, as well as high levels of communication, participation and input.

To accomplish greater things across our nation and in our own provinces, cities and towns, local churches practice generosity to our co-labourers. Through our expression of being a cooperative Fellowship, we tithe (10%) to the Fellowship through our respective districts and, in turn, practice a

shared responsibility of tithing to the international office. These funds help support approximately 70% of the Fellowship Services budget and 30% of the Mission Canada budget. The International Missions global ministry, while an effective global expression of our cooperative Fellowship, receives its support separately through engaged congregations and donors.

WE ARE BETTER TOGETHER

- We demonstrate our desire to work together from the outset by affiliating.
- We participate together as a relationally-based mission family, investing in the shared vision and mission of the Fellowship.
- We financially support the Fellowship's district and International Office's ministries and services through a Fellowship tithe (10%) of our local church's contributions.
- We actively engage and support the national and international mission of the PAOC as an expression of the local church's ministry.

Rivers are important to people. In Scripture, we see that they are also important to God. Rivers are always moving. Powerful waters provide refreshment and rest for people, as well as nourishment for the ecosystem around them. We can never underestimate the important role of a church in a local community and the incredible impact it can have.

THE LOCAL CHURCH

While we are diverse as local churches in our expression as self-governing assemblies, it is amazing when we realize that we are all steadfast in our collective effort to make disciples – everywhere.

There is incredible power in a shared vision. The local church is like a refreshing, forceful, life-giving river.

Anyone living near one of Canada's great rivers knows that the river's flow often changes throughout the year, running high during rainy seasons and low during dry summer months. There are similar seasons

in the life of a local church, but across Canada, this truth remains: PAOC churches are places where God's people, empowered by and dependent on the Holy Spirit, tell the life-transforming story of Jesus Christ.

We believe it is critical for our PAOC churches to be self-governing. They have been given the right of self-government, an "inherent right to sovereignty in the conduct of their own affairs." It does not equate with being independent or autonomous but rather allows for a high level of local empowerment and diversity.

We value and respect what makes us uniquely different, knowing that together we are part of a greater body of Pentecostal leaders and congregations across Canada who are called by God to fulfil His mandate to share the good news.

We hold to a statement of faith that unites us, yet we may reach our communities in different ways. Uniquely, we respond to God's leading with the freedom to do what He is asking us to do in our geographical settings.

WE ARE THE SAME YET DIFFERENT

- Each local church calls its own pastor, appoints its own leadership, holds property and sets operational policies.
- Each local church has a membership of committed believers who unite to be salt and light in the mission field of their local community.
- Each local church is given the opportunity to conduct its own affairs yet has the covering of a district leadership team and national family.

With a Charter signed in 1919, our history is rich and has known great kingdom impact for nearly 100 years. Our archives are filled with countless stories that tell of how we have been better together.

Walk along a river and explore the wetlands. Feel the strength and protection of a riverbank, known as the riparian zone. This zone provides stability to moving water, protecting the river and riverbanks by reducing erosion and improving water quality. It

provides shelter for animals and fish. Without it, the river is made vulnerable. Similarly, the PAOC works to protect and offer security.

OUR AFFILIATION

Without question, the impact of the river's life multiplies within the banks of affiliation and cooperation.

When a church or leader makes a decision to affiliate, it is choosing to become family—making a choice to work in unity with like-minded leaders, local churches and ministries. It is declaring a desire to belong, to be part of the greater whole. When we affiliate, we join together with others. We become connected. We align, moving forward together in the same direction, with purpose and a unity of heart. Strength, stability, shelter, security and support are ours.

Local churches, ministries and credential holders who affiliate find value in the relationship. We affiliate with the PAOC's history, identity and spirituality. We come together in agreement on the PAOC's Statement of Essential Truths and hold true to these truths in our teaching. By affiliating, we bond in structure and governance through a local church, district and national constitutions. Affiliation also allows pastors and leaders to hold credentials with the district in which they are located, providing them with a direct, accountable and privileged relationship, as set out in the General Constitution and By-Laws. Credential holders hold to a Ministerial Code of Ethics. We choose to be accountable to one another. That's what family does.

As we choose a relationship with the PAOC, local churches participate in a commitment to the shared vision, core values and mission of the Fellowship. We care about the spiritual, missional and theological vitality of the family. We are accountable to one another for sound doctrine. We equip one another with the call to make disciples. We declare publicly that we are in community.

WE WORK TOGETHER, SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER

- In our shared missional initiatives, including church planting and church revitalization.
- Through leader and church development (Bible colleges, district-facilitated initiatives, conferences and events, online mentoring, visits and consultations).
- As we care for fellow leaders and churches when needs arise in times of transition, bereavement, restoration and conflict resolution.
- Administratively and through our Fellowship services (credentials, legal and government processes, constitutions, credentialed leadership, and organizational functions).

Simply put, we are better together. When we choose to embrace a shared vision and mission, we know that our own local church is living out the Great Commission. Together, we are making disciples in our Jerusalem (locally), in our Judea (districts and regionally), in our Samaria (across our nation and through Mission Canada) and to the outermost parts of the earth (through our International Missions endeavours).

Truly, we are better together.



Aligned for Mission

The mission of the church, as commissioned by Jesus, has been before us for close to 2,000 years. His people, empowered by the Spirit, and motivated by the love, grace and truth of our Lord, are to go to all peoples and proclaim the Good News, which brings transformation. The mission's fruit is to see disciplined followers of Jesus developed, who, in obedience, are baptized and observe all that Jesus commanded as they, too, go and make disciples. This cycle of disciple-making indicates that the mission is being fulfilled.

It is always good to be reminded that the giver of this commission is the “Lord of the harvest,” the One who oversees this mission. Our responsibility is to obediently hear the call and follow the Spirit's guidance as we participate alongside the Lord's entire body.

Here's the thing—the entire mission does not rest on one person, one church, one group of churches, one Christian communion or even one generation of Christians. It is way bigger than any of those. The Lord calls, and we respond, as have millions before us, and hundreds of millions more are doing even as I write. All His people, called by His name, whatever their “branding” is, are chosen to be witnesses to those in the multiple contexts He sends them to.

In many Christian circles, 2033 is being commemorated as the 2,000th anniversary of the death and resurrection of Jesus, His ascension, and His outpouring of the Spirit on His church to fulfil His mission. This has resulted in a unified understanding in many parts of the global church that the Lord of the harvest is calling His people to be “aligned for mission.”

Amid global signs of the times similar to what Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24, there is also a recognition of what He stated in Matthew 24:14, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

A decade-long, multi-component focus pointed toward a unified mission that would see the gospel of the kingdom preached to the whole world is taking place. For instance, the Pentecostal World Fellowship Executive and Advisory at the Pentecostal World

Conference in Korea passed a resolution calling on Spirit-empowered congregations across the globe to focus on fulfilling the Great Commission by 2033. The resolution reads:

The Pentecostal World Fellowship encourages its members to work towards fulfilling the Great Commission in this generation. We affirm the numerous 2033 initiatives focused on “Everyone” hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ. We call upon our member congregations to mobilize prayer, leadership, compassion, and resources to contact every unreached person. We believe the next ten years will be the greatest decade of fulfilling the mandate of Jesus as together, empowered by the Spirit, we proclaim the “Good News” and establish new churches.

This re-personalization of sharing the gospel calls for a focus to go to “Everyone” by everyone. Personal witness and evangelism are not optional for a people committed to the mission given by our Lord. The evangelists among God's people will be called on to be equippers of all believers, along with fulfilling their distinct calling to reach the unreached. Ministries that facilitate evangelism in secularized contexts, such as Alpha, envision enhanced partnerships that will allow for greater fruitfulness.

This call to “Everyone” is essential for the church multiplication movements envisioned over the coming years. The World Assemblies of God Fellowship, in its MM33 initiative, is, by faith, strategizing for a total of one million churches by 2033. Aligned multiplication network endeavours need to be front and centre as our various movements partner together for kingdom increase of disciple-making communities, as seen in other initiatives such as “Finishing the Task” led by Rick Warren and the FINISH initiative of the Church of God and the Global Church Network. FINISH calls on churches to Find, Intercede, Network, Invest, Send and Harvest.

Running like a spine through all of these initiatives are prayer movements such as World Prays, whose mission is Every Church in Every Nation a House of Prayer. Prayer movements are seeking to be electronically linked as they pray for every nation, community and person on the planet. In the coming season, prayer movements will need to consciously focus on the primary mission of the church and not be distracted by secondary focuses.

By faith, picture with me church movements and resource ministries aligned for mission—globally, nationally, regionally and locally. Marked by first love, prayer and intercession, the people of God together proclaim the gospel through personal witness and cooperative evangelism. Every believer participates in unity with justice and sacrificial service. Empowered by the Spirit, vital churches multiply as disciple-making communities.

The good news is that our Lord, by the Spirit, is at work globally in ways that we cannot think or imagine. Let us determine to align with the Lord of the harvest and His people, every descriptor and context, to see this gospel of the kingdom preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Enable us to align our hearts, minds and strategies with Yours and those who love You so that together we may see Your mission fulfilled in multiple transformed lives. For Your glory, Amen.



David Wells
General Superintendent

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