A Guide on
Cooperative Leadership as
Spiritual Formation
Introduction

Through the lens of the teachings in Micah 6:8, this guide on cooperative leadership as spiritual formation invites readers to reflect on how we meaningfully gather across lines of difference. Cooperative leadership offers a host of principles and community building practices to consider from a spiritual perspective. How are we doing justice, being kind, and walking humbly amongst one another? How do we maintain such spirit in a time of political polarization? How do we collaborate with those whose lived experience and backgrounds are different from our own?

Intended for both group reflection and individual study, fellowship opportunities and spiritual formation sessions, this guide encourages us to meet others where they are, while reminding each of us of the need to walk humbly, be kind, and do justice. It defines the hallmarks of cooperative leadership, offers practical applications, questions for reflection, demonstrates the connection between scripture and cooperative leadership, and includes a list of additional resources for further study.

So…What is Cooperative Leadership?

Cooperative leadership is a model and culture of collaborating with team members equitably. It invites individuals and groups to reflect and practice the following principles:

- Adhering to an inclusive decision-making process
- Learning how others are doing, what they need or believe, what they want
- Being willing to admit mistakes
- Remaining humble
- Effectively communicating, actively sharing and listening
- Being supportive, consistent and trustworthy
- Inviting the unique knowledge, wisdom and lived experience that everyone in the group brings to the space
- Creating shared group values that reflect justice
- Demonstrating graciousness towards the humanity of others

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Helpful and Harmful Qualities of Group Culture

The table below lists various qualities that help animate healthy group culture and contrasts them with qualities that inhibit and drain energy from a group. In the groups you participate in, do you recognize any of the behaviors that either help or harm your group’s vitality and well-being? Later in the guide, we’ll share some practical suggestions on how your group might shift away from running into any of those potentially harmful patterns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helpful Qualities of Group Culture</th>
<th>Potentially Harmful Qualities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexible, experimental</td>
<td>Overly rigid and perfectionist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fun, celebratory, and appreciative of each other</td>
<td>Too serious and stressful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humble</td>
<td>Superiority complex and unwillingness to listen to feedback</td>
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<td>Shares work well</td>
<td>Isolationist, competitive, and work is done in silos</td>
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<td>Able to have generative conflict and repair</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>Secrecy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clear priorities and realistic expectations</td>
<td>Overwork, perfectionism and neglect of the whole human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generosity</td>
<td>Scarcity mindset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values driven</td>
<td>Reactionary tendencies and lack of clarity</td>
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Adapted from Dean Spade’s *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During the Crisis (And the Next)*
How Does Scripture Relate to Cooperative Leadership?

In addition to Micah 6:8, there are many other passages from scripture we can look to help us deepen our understanding of the principles of cooperative leadership. In the examples below, we list how they connect with cooperative leadership. Consider having your group reflect on one or more of these examples. Can you identify other principles of cooperative leadership that pertain to each passage? What other bible passages come to mind as embodying the spirit of cooperative leadership? Are there any passages that might give more insight into those potentially harmful qualities noted above?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Scriptures</th>
<th>Meaning for Cooperative Leadership</th>
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| “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit... (1 Corinthians 12:7-8).” | ● Everyone has lived experience and knowledge that can be learned from  
● Diverse biblical interpretation can be a positive  
● Learn about and welcome the gifts that everyone brings  
● God’s power can work through everyone |
| “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:35).” | ● Love is foundational to cooperative leadership  
● Recognize the full humanity of others  
● Humility is a sign of spiritual strength |
| “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another (Romans 12:4-5).” | ● Embrace the respective differences and strengths within the group  
● Celebrate inclusivity through action  
● Diversity goes beyond symbolism |
Eucharistic Solidarity, Community Building and Cooperative Leadership

We opened this guide by asserting that following the principles of cooperative leadership offers us an opportunity to engage in community building practices from a spiritual perspective. As people of faith, we are well aware of the theological and spiritual concepts that serve as the foundation to shaping more loving and supportive communities. The calls for deep reflection and honest conversation described above are essential steps in the cooperative leadership model of community building.

We’d like to introduce one more key concept as you and the people in your communities dive into this necessary and life-giving work: Eucharistic solidarity. Eucharistic solidarity invites us into cooperative leadership by calling on us to embrace difference, our common humanity, and the dignity of each other’s unique lived experiences. According to theologian M. Shawn Copeland, Eucharistic solidarity “…transforms the meaning of our being human, of embodying Christ,” asking us to consider how the Eucharist brings us together in Godly peace and love despite our differences.

Given our current context, what might approaching our community building work through a lens of Eucharistic solidarity and God’s call to be more humble, just and kind look like? What ways could we best model the helpful qualities listed above?

Consider the following as representations of Eucharistic solidarity as a community building practice leading us to cooperative leadership:

- Sharing a meal together after reading scriptures related to justice, kindness and humility
- Engaging in a reading group centering works of love and justice
- Working together on an art or service project (community gardens, food distributions, canvassing, etc.) within your local church or community
- Hosting a storytelling session where participants share about important memories and interests
- Writing and reciting works of poetry together
- Taking prayer walks together and spending time in green spaces
Questions for Reflection

1) What qualities would you like to define your group culture?
2) How is your group embodying a culture of wellness and care?
3) What does positive leadership and community mean to you?
4) What are accountability practices that you find healthy and meaningful?
5) What spiritual practices help you ground yourself to be in community in supportive ways?
6) How does your theology empower others to assume their God-given gifts?
7) Does your space function in ways that recognize the full humanity (talents, work/life balance, etc.) of those present? How so? If not, what would this look like for you?
8) What would you like to add to this guide?
9) In what ways do you already demonstrate practices of cooperative leadership?

Additional Resources

Watch: Martin Luther King Beloved Community
Book: Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being by M. Shawn Copeland
Book: Jesus and the Disinherited by Howard Thurman

Have questions?
Contact Rudy Logan (rlogan@edow.org), Interim Missioner for Equity and Justice.