## Mission and Ministry Study

The Presbytery of Milwaukee requires a Mission Study prior to the search for a Pastor or Associate Pastor. The best assessments involve everyone who wishes to be involved and will ask these or similar questions:

* What are we doing as a congregation? What is God calling us to do in the next phase of our ministry?
* What are the needs of our community? What is God calling us to do to meet those needs?
* What specifically will we do to strengthen our congregational and community ministry in the next year?
* What must pastor and lay leaders do to help that to happen (for a congregation seeking a pastor)?
* What kind of skills, experience, and person do we need as our pastor?

If a study has recently been completed, a full assessment may not be required. The session should consider the results of such a study carefully to understand the mission of the church and the qualities required in the person to be called. The COM liaison and the session should meet to study and interpret the findings and determine if they are adequate for the purposes of calling a pastor.

Transitional times in congregational life are frequently fragile and characterized by high anxiety. During such times, it is important for the congregation to engage in some time of self-reflection and to articulate clearly its sense of identity and calling as a particular community of faith before it moves on in its journey. The preparation of a mission and ministry statement presents a real opportunity for church growth.

Furthermore, the mission and ministry statement is an important instrument that helps to guide the work of the Pastor Nominating Committee. As an integral part of the Ministry Information Form, the mission and ministry statement characterizes the life and work of the congregation. The collective understanding of the statement provides PNC members with common ground.

### WHEN can we begin?

The mission study process begins after the departing pastor has left. The dynamics of ending a relationship are more complicated than most people realize. How people say “goodbye” to their previous pastor will be a significant factor in how they are able to say “hello” to their new pastor. It is important for congregations to take the time to say appropriate farewells in order to insure a healthy transition.

In addition, it is important to preserve the integrity of the departing pastor who, though admittedly in a “lame duck” position, continues to be responsible for ministry to and with the people until departure. Furthermore, the congregation needs to be free to determine its future without the inappropriate influence of the departing pastor. The mission study and statement should be the result of the congregation’s independent self-reflection and vision.

### WHO prepares the Mission and Ministry Statement?

The session is responsible for producing the mission and ministry statement. However, it is important that the session include the congregation in this process. The statement is not a secret document produced at closed meetings. The more people who are engaged in reflecting upon the mission and ministry of the church, the broader the ownership will be of that mission.

In most cases, the session delegates this work to a sub-committee of session or appoints a Mission and Ministry Task Force. Following a study of the church mission and ministry, the delegated work group prepares a draft of a Mission and Ministry statement for editing and approval by the session. Most interim pastors have some experience with the process and are able to offer counsel.

### WHAT is involved in a Mission Study?

The preparation of a ministry and mission statement requires conducting a study of congregational life that will solicit the responses to critical questions about identity and vision. This study can be extensive and explicit or modest and informal. In any case, it should be intentionally designed to gather information from a wide variety of people who comprise the membership. The mission study is a spiritual discernment process that provides the congregation with an opportunity for self-reflection, which can be enlivening and encouraging.

Ask the COM liaison about possible resources available through the Presbytery. Some congregations use written questionnaires to conduct church-wide surveys. Some churches conduct open hearings, small group gatherings, or interviews. Some have used all these techniques. Whatever means are used for the mission study, it is important to let the people in the pews know that they have input into the future of their congregational life. The broader the sense of involvement and investment the more representative the mission study is likely to be.

### WHAT should be said in the Ministry and Mission Statement?

The statement should articulate the congregation’s strengths and uniqueness in the Body of Christ and help define directions for mission and ministry the congregation feels called to pursue.

#### UNIQUENESS

Not all Presbyterians are alike. Each congregation has its own set of self-images that heavily influences how it goes about its life and work. Congregational identity is affected by many circumstances including size, history, community, theological preference, age profile, and economics. The study process and resultant statement should answer such questions as: Who are we? How are we unique as a community of faith? How does our setting affect who we are?

#### DIRECTIONS

Although all Christians share the common calling of being a witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, each congregation chooses the ways in which it will fulfill this calling. The mission statement should answer other questions such as: Where do we want to go? What is God calling us to? What are our hopes for congregational life and outreach into the community and world? How are we going to get there? What processes will we employ to fulfill our calling? Who will be involved?

The statement needs to be specific enough to identify the particularity and peculiarity of the local congregation and yet broad enough to outline effective goals for about five years. Annual review of the mission statement should assist sessions in naming specific plans for action. The statement itself may be as short as a few paragraphs and as long as two pages. Although an abundance of information and data may emerge during the mission statement process, it is not necessary to include all of that information in the mission statement. However, such gathered data would be helpful to a Pastor Nominating Committee as it prepares the church information form.

### WHY can’t we just use an old mission and ministry statement?

If a statement has not been written within the last five years, a new one is necessary. Congregations need to reflect upon and answer the question “who are we now in light of these new circumstances?” Even if a mission and ministry statement is just a few years old, the session should consider how it might be revised and updated to reflect current attitudes, challenges, and visions in the congregation.

### HOW long does the mission and ministry statement process take?

It is not unusual for this process to take three to six months.

* Presbytery liaison (COM liaison or presbytery staff member who specializes in mission studies) visits session to explain process
* Session appoints a sub-committee to design and implement study process and statement preparation Congregational input – surveys, interviews, hearings, etc.
* Review of data by sub-committee
* Drafting, revising, editing of statement – It is highly recommended that the statement be reviewed with the Presbytery liaison during this period so that suggestions can be offered prior to statement’s adoption by session.
* Session reviews, edits, approves, and adopts statement
* Statement sent to Commission on Ministry for approval, if calling a pastor.

Once the statement has received all of the necessary approvals, it is important to share it with the congregation. It should appear regularly in newsletters, bulletins, posted prominently, and included in visitor information materials. Effective church ministry requires broad-based ownership of the church’s identity and mission.