

MISSION AND MINISTRY STUDY

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. This is why the Presbytery of Milwaukee requires a Mission Study prior to the search for a Pastor or Associate 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.)

WHEN can we begin?

The mission study process usually 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 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 Study?

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.

WHAT is involved in a Mission Study?

A good Mission Study seeks to answer three questions: Who have we been? Who are we now? Who do we want to become?

Asking “Who have we been?” invites the congregation into conversation to remember what is past. It provides an opportunity to give thanks, help heal past wounds, to honor those who have come before, and to say goodbye. It recognizes that congregations do not exist in a vacuum but consist of people who live and die, change and grow and with them likewise the ministry and surrounding community change and evolve.

Asking “Who are we now?” invites the congregation to name what it values and does in the name of Christ, in the present. It calls for honest reflection of the current ministry: what are we doing and why? who are we seeking to serve? how are we doing this (what teams, structures, and/or individuals make our ministry happen?) what gifts and resources do we possess? and what are we known for in our region?

Asking “Who do we want to become?” invites the congregation not only to dream but to envision who God is calling you to be. It encourages deep listening to the needs of community around you, each other, and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit who always asks us to bring the two together. It understands that you may well need to develop new skills and consider new models for ministry and pastoral leadership.

How you go about answering these questions should be determined by the session or a team designated to oversee this work. Your process can be extensive and explicit or modest and informal. In any case, it should be intentionally designed to be an enlivening and encouraging process engaging a wide variety of people who comprise the membership. Your COM liaison can help to provide you with resources. Also, the Presbytery highly recommends the congregation participate in the Holy Cow: Congregational Assessment Tool (CAT). The CAT (or Conversations for smaller congregations) is a customizable assessment instrument that can help:

- Measure the level of satisfaction and energy in the congregation and learn what ministries provide energy and satisfaction in your congregation
- Pinpoint the strengths of your congregation’s culture
- Discover where members would like to go in the future
- Gauge readiness for change
- Uncover potential resources you may be missing
- And more

The MIF requires: a brief Mission statement, the congregation’s vision for ministry, how the congregation feels called to reach out to address the emerging needs of its community, and how the pastoral “position” will help you reach your vision and mission goals. It’s important that both your PNC and members of your congregation be able to answer these questions well. This will help to ensure the best possible match for your next pastor.

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 and surrounding community.

HOW long does the process take?

While there is no set timeline, it is not unusual for this process to take three to six months. As your learnings directly affect what goes into a Ministry Information Form in your search for a new pastor *and* the ministry direction of your congregation into the future, this is something you want to do well. During the process and once completed, it’s important to share the results with the congregation, as effective church ministry requires broad-based ownership of the church’s identity and mission.