

STAGE II: THE PRE-SEARCH PROCESS

Developing a Congregational Vision: Using Mission and Ministry Study or Congregational Self Study Tools

In the Presbytery of Genesee Valley, there are times during the life of a congregation when a Congregational Self Study or a Mission and Ministry Study are both necessary and helpful in order to create a clear vision of the church's future. This work results in a Mission Statement.

1. A clear Mission Statement will help guide the work of a Pastor Nominating Committee or of the Session when it performs the tasks of a PNC. It will be an integral part of the Ministry Information Form and must be adopted by the Session.
2. A Congregation elects to review, evaluate, and update its vision and objectives in order to more effectively identify and implement its particular ministry. A Mission and Ministry Study is required to begin within the first two years of a new pastorate if the Congregational Self Study is implemented during the transitional period. A healthy congregation will review its vision every 3-5 years.

WHY a Mission and Ministry Statement?

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 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 mission and ministry study or congregational self study 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?

When Reviewing and Updating CONGREGATIONAL VISION:

The mission and ministry study can begin at any time in the life of a congregation. It is recommended that congregations engage in this every three to five years or within the first two years of a new pastorate. This is especially helpful if the demographics inside or outside of the church have changed or when a pastor served a church for an extended period of time. Engaging in regular review and evaluating enriches the life of the congregation and provides the occasion for renewed commitment. This regular ongoing work can be an advantage to congregation if/when a pastoral transition occurs.

During a Pastoral Transition:

An evaluation of a congregation's goals should not begin until after the departing pastor has left. This is often difficult for a congregation to understand. It is not uncommon for anxious people to want to initiate the process of finding a new pastor as soon as possible. However, it is very important that the congregation wait until the departing pastor has left for several reasons.

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 ensure 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 own future without the influence of the departing pastor. The congregational self study or mission and ministry study and the resulting statement should be the result of the congregation’s independent self-reflection and vision.

Any questions about the appropriate time to begin work on the congregational self study or the mission and ministry study should be addressed to the Committee on Ministry liaison.

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, or even recently written, the session should consider how it was developed and how newly gathered data might require it to be revised updated or rewritten to reflect current attitudes, challenges, and visions in the congregation.

WHAT is involved in a Congregational Self Study or a Mission and Ministry Study?

The study is a spiritual discernment process which provides the congregation with an opportunity for self-reflection which can be enlivening and encouraging. The mission study requires a congregation to look both inside and outside to solicit the answer 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 about the membership of the congregation and the dynamics of community.

WHO prepares the Mission and Ministry Statement?

The Session is responsible for producing the mission and ministry statement that will be used on the Ministry Information Form (MIF). However, it is important that the Session include the congregation in this process. The study and resulting statement are not secret documents 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 vision.

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 or the congregational self study, the delegated work group prepares a draft of a Mission and Ministry Statement for editing and approval by the Session.

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 its vision for mission and ministry which the congregation feels called to pursue.

UNIQUENESS:

Not all Presbyterians are alike. Each congregation has its own set of self-images which 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 resulting 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 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 statement should assist sessions in naming specific plans for action.

The statement itself may be as short a paragraph and as long as one page. Although an abundance of information and data may emerge during the congregational self study or the mission study process, it is not necessary to include all of that information in the mission statement. Such gathered data would be helpful to a Pastor Nominating Committee as it prepares the Ministry Information Form.

It is important to share the resulting mission statement 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 vision.

HOW long does the mission and ministry study process take?

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

- COM liaison 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.
- Community data gathering: demographics, etc.
- Review of data by sub-committee
- Drafting, revising, editing of statement
- Session reviews, edits, approves, and adopts statement
- Statement sent to Committee on Ministry
- After approval by COM, statement is included in MIF

HOW long does the Congregational Self Study process take?

For a resource to guide you see [*Design for Congregational Self-Study*](#).

RESOURCES which are available

For resources to help a congregation in the Mission and Ministry Study process, see [*Some Clarification of Definitions and Process*](#) and [*Models for Writing a Mission and Ministry Study*](#).

There are also resource books for mission study available by contacting the Presbytery Resource Center. **Especially helpful information from PC(U.S.A.) Research Services can be found on the PC(U.S.A.) website at <http://www.pcusa.org/research/help.htm> .**

To gather information about congregational life some congregations use written questionnaires to conduct church-wide surveys. One recommended tool is The [*U. S. Congregational Life Survey*](#). Some churches also conduct open hearings, small group gatherings, or interviews to discuss survey results. Some have used all of these techniques.

To gather information about the community some congregations have used public records and/or interviewed community leaders. Some basic information about specific zip codes is available from [*PC\(U.S.A.\) Research Services*](#).