

Guidelines for Congregational Mission Study/Congregational Survey

***Be Transformed by the Renewal of Your Mind:* A Guide to Mission Statements in the Church**

Introduction

In the letter to the Romans, Paul wrote, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2, NRSV). A perfect description of a mission statement for a community of faith. A declaration of the eternal striving for God's will - that could describe the essence of a mission statement. There was a time when mission statements were very popular. From churches to business organizations, everyone developed mission statements. Retreats, both ecclesiastical and corporate, centered around creating a mission statement for a church, a department, a business, a project. We were collectively bombarded by mission statements!

Perhaps the term 'mission statement' is one of those that is used so often we, in the church, have lost sight of its particularly unique relevance for us as a part of the Body of Christ. What is a mission statement anyway? Does it differ from a vision statement? A plethora of resources abound - as detailed or as general as anyone would like. There are multiple definitions. It's confusing to look at the vastness of available information! The purpose of this booklet, therefore, will be to swim through the sea of data to summarize for the individual church what it means to develop and live into a mission statement.

Why do a mission statement?

The purpose of the church is to serve God, so why bother with a mission statement? Not only is each church diverse in its personality, each community of faith is called to live as God's own in different ways. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he wrote of the many and varied tasks of the church. "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone." Each church has its own singularly unique mission to the world. Together we comprise the Body of Christ.

One of the hallmark cries of Presbyterians is *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*, the church reformed and always to be reformed. That does not mean that we are blown about by the winds of change but that we are purposefully living both in a state of looking to God for God's will and guidance and, at the same time, looking inward - examining ourselves to see how we can best be who God has called us to be. "Consider your call." (I Corinthians 1: 26) Churches, like people, change with time and experience. There is an ebb and flow to the life of any church, and a mission statement responds to the rhythm of the congregation.

Changes can be brought about in a congregation due to the demands of daily living, but there are also major transitions that occur affecting every church body. With each change in leadership, congregations adjust and adapt. A new minister or CLP brings fresh insight, new ideas, different perspectives. Members join and leave creating a ripple of changing experiences in the well that is the church. A crisis in the church, the community, or even in larger society can also impact a church's identity. With each life-changing event, the church is called to examine itself with new eyes, look at God's claim, and determine if she is still being true to that call. Thus, mission statements fill a deep need in the church to be aware of who she is and how God calls her to live out the Gospel.

What is a mission statement?

A mission statement is a celebration! It is an opportunity for a church to rejoice in her God-given gifts and talents as they are used in a particular setting. Not a brag sheet, a mission statement is an open, honest inventory of the identity of a church. It carves out a place in the world for the church, grounding her in the traditions of the past, living out the missional call of the church in today's world, and seeking God's vision and hope for the future.

A mission statement is:

- clear - Use simple sentences, plain language.
- concise - Be brief; one paragraph is sufficient.
- concrete - Be specific.
- energetic - Make it interesting.
- practical - It serves as guideline for the church's identity and actions.
- honest - Do not claim to be something you are not.

A mission statement boldly asserts, "This is who God has called us to be, and this is our hope for the future."

How is a mission statement prepared?

Prayer undergirds the foundation of any mission statement. The first step, therefore, is to pray - seeking God's guidance and wisdom. In a larger church, often a committee is selected by the Session to formulate the new mission statement. Other churches will utilize the Session itself for this task. Throughout the process, humble, honest prayer with openness to hear God is essential.

Congregational surveys are quite useful in taking the pulse of the congregation. What do the people of the church see as strengths and weaknesses? What is their vision of what the church could be? Surveys can be as straightforward as the one attached, or you can access some of the other resources included. Outside firms that specialize in church surveys can be brought in to aid the process. The PC (U.S.A.) website (www.pcusa.org/congregations) offers valuable information. What is imperative is that, no matter the format, the church takes a look at who she is - gifts, strengths, and areas needing improvement - and where she feels God is leading her in the future.

The survey situation can be augmented by congregational discussions. For example, at a church dinner, each table can talk about the church using questions as simple as "What do you like about

this church?", "What do you dislike?", "What do we do well?", "What could we do better?". These four questions can serve as a springboard for some lively discussion that will offer a great deal of insight into the church as a dynamic body.

With all this information gathered, the committee can then begin the process of constructing the statement. This is an excellent time to compile the responses from the church, study other mission statements, and begin to consolidate ideas. Once a first draft is developed, it is reviewed and discussed. Collect feedback from others. The group then comes together once more to revise the statement, develop a consensus, and shape the mission statement that best fits this particular part of the Body of Christ.

How often should a mission statement be revisited?

Certainly, every time a church enters a major transition, such as change in leadership or crisis within the church, the mission statement should be examined and retooled. Even among churches with consistent leadership and few upheavals, it is best to regularly look at the mission statement. Are we living into what we believe God has called us to do? Are we true to the picture created in this statement?

Conclusion

Mission statements encourage the church to ask, "Are we listening to God?" It provides focus, a sense of purpose, an identity, clarity. It is the center around which the church develops programs, missions, projects. Mission statements provide shape and structure for the church to live out her call to God.

Sample Mission Statements

Resources

Presbytery survey

Studying Congregations: A new handbook edited by Nancy T. Ammerman, et. al.

CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY

Please answer the following questions as they best fit *your* view of this congregation. At the end of each section, you will find opportunities to offer comments.

I. What Is Important?

Rank in order of importance (1 being most important; 5 being least important)

I'd like to see:

Education _____
Fellowship _____
Mission _____
Stewardship _____
Worship _____

II. What Does Our Congregation Do?

For the following questions, please use the scale below:

1 Very much so
2 somewhat
3 adequate
4 needs much improvement
5 not at all

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Our worship experience reflects who we are. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Our worship experience connects us with God. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. There is Christian education for all ages. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. The church provides enough opportunities for individual and group spiritual growth. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. The church reaches out to the greater community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. There are adequate fellowship opportunities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. The church is active in mission work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. The church takes good care of those in need:
the ill, shut-ins, ones in crisis, grief | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

OVER

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9. In this church, there is clear understanding of what it means to be Presbyterian. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Stewardship-use of time, talents, and money- is clearly understood as expressions of God's grace. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

What does this church do best?

Where does this church need the most improvement?

Other comments:

III. Who Are We

Using the same scale as provided for Section II, please answer the following questions:

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The leaders of the church-Session and committee members-are well known and easily accessible. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Communication of events and decisions is timely and open. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. This church enjoys cooperative efforts with other congregations. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Lay leadership is important to this church. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Conflict and disagreements are adequately addressed. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. This church's theology is conservative. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. This church's worship is traditional. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. A visitor would feel welcome in this church. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. The church has a clear, hopeful vision for the future. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. If this church were to disappear, it would impact my life. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

How would you describe this church to a potential visitor?

Other comments:

Thank you for being a part of the effort to develop a statement of hope for the future of the church.