

## Mission Study Overview

### ***The What's and Why's***

The term, “mission study” literally refers to “studying the mission of a church.” This is an excellent and exciting opportunity for a church to reexamine its ministry goals; its previous and future pastoral leadership needs; the bases of its program activities; and whether its program is meeting the current needs of the congregation and the community surrounding the church geographically.

The Presbytery hopes that a Session will consider the Mission Study process as a way to assess the health and vitality of a congregation. It is also a way to review a congregation’s utilization of resources and energy in terms of what the churches’ mission is and how it is being implemented. In this process a local church is able to reaffirm and /or restructure its vision of mission, ministry and pastoral leadership for a five to ten year period.

Congregations are asked to undertake mission studies for specific reasons. Most often a session is asked to do a mission study because of a pastoral transition. Before a church begins a pastoral search, a mission study is a way of reviewing where the church is in the context of the community, its membership, its finances and its pastoral leadership needs. With that information base, the church can articulate to potential pastoral candidates its mission in the near and distant future.

Churches may also consider a mission study in the following circumstances:

- When more than five years have elapsed since the previous mission study
- When the community in which the church is located is changing (industry moves in or out, demographics shift, etc...)
- When there has been a major change in the congregation (a split, a significant increase or decrease in resources, a significant change in non-pastoral staff, etc...)

The resulting product of a mission study is then helpful to a session in understanding its current conditions and in providing a holistic portrait of the church. It also assists the Pastoral Nominating Committee (PNC) with its task of completing the Church Information Form requesting a description of the church and its ministries.

IF a Session seriously undertakes a mission study, a critical review of the churches’ current circumstances will occur in a comprehensive manner. Frequently, a session avoids conducting a mission study because it is perceived as an added and unnecessary step that delays the search for a pastor. On the contrary, a call process after a mission study is often more streamlined and more focused because the PNC and Session have a clear understanding of the kind of candidate that they are seeking.

### ***The How***

The Session is ultimately responsible for the Mission Study. The Session may appoint a team, task group or sub-committee to do the work. The Session is also responsible for allocating funding for the task. When the work is complete the Mission Study is submitted to the Session for review and adoption. It is then sent to presbytery to be included in the permanent church file.

The primary goal of the Mission Study is to comprehensively reflect upon the history of the congregation, review the current status and set direction for the future of the congregation in the areas of :

- Spiritual Health
- Membership and Church Growth
- Finances and Stewardship
- Pastoral Leadership
- Mission
- The role of congregation in the community

The secondary goal is to write a concise report of the findings and make recommendations to the Session for the future of the congregation.

There are five general steps to the Mission Study process.

1. Reflection – “Where have we come from?” What are the events, activities, issues, important stories, and people that have affected who we are today?
2. Gathering Information – “Who are we?”
  - a. Membership Trends
  - b. Program Trends
  - c. Financial Trends
  - d. Community Trends
  - e. Pastoral Trends

This information can be gathered in a variety of ways including Cottage Meetings, Congregational Meetings and Small Group Discussion, Questionnaire (mailed, emailed, hard copy etc..)

There should also be a time of information sharing with the congregation. Compile the data and provide opportunities for reflection and feedback from the whole congregation.

3. Analyzing the data – “So What?”
  - a. How have our characteristics and the characteristics of the community influenced what we have done and what we can do? How has our history brought us to this time and place?
  
4. Envisioning - “Now What?”
  - a. Now that we know where we’ve come from and where we are – what do we want to become?
  - b. What is God’s call for this church and what is our mission?
  - c. What are our dreams for this congregation?
  - d. What needs to stay the same?
  - e. What needs to change?
  
5. Strategic Planning
  - a. Who is your target community?
  - b. How will you accomplish the mission with measureable goals?

**Resources**

Holy Conversations

Congregations

Census Data

## Process Guideline

- Pastor leaves
- COM completes Session Exit Interview and Pastor Exit Interview
- An Interim is hired (this can take some time depending on the situation)
- Session names a Mission Study Team
- Mission Study is completed and sent to Session for review and adoption (the Interim may consult with the Mission Study team and offer them process help) (this phase may take 6 – 12 months depending on the depth of the study.)

During this time the Interim will be working with the Session and Congregation on five developmental tasks. The amount of time spent on these tasks varies greatly from congregation to congregation and is highly context specific.

### 1. Coming to Terms with History

It is important for congregations to know their history so that they can appreciate their heritage and at the same time be aware of the issues and concerns that need to be resolved in order to move freely into the future.

### 2. Discovering a New Identity

Identity is the task of understanding "who we are now in our present context and what it is we understand God is calling us to be." It is the task of developing the vision to which a congregation is being called.

### 3. Shifts of Power/Leadership Changes

In most congregations over a period of time the leadership begins to take on much of the style and values of the previous pastor. When that pastor leaves, there is often a time when persons who have been in leadership rethink their commitment and determine whether or not they want to continue in leadership positions. Other persons often find the interim time an opportunity to take leadership roles. This is an opportune time to empower those who are out of power and to welcome leadership gifts from all parts of the congregation.

### 4. Rethinking Denominational Linkages

Congregations often are not aware of the support and resources they receive from their middle judicatory and national denominational structures. That relationship is normally more visible while the structures of the church beyond the congregation are engaged in working with the congregation in moving through the interim period and seeking to find the right pastor to call. The transition time helps raise the awareness of a congregation to its denominational heritage, ministries and resources.

#### 5. Commitment to New Leadership and to a New Future

When a congregation has developed a shared vision of its future and has sought to call a pastor to help lead it in moving into that future, there will probably be a new commitment both to that new leader and to that new future.

- Session elects PNC
- PNC uses the Mission Study as it begins to write the Church Information Form
- The PNC does its work in consultation with COM culminating in presenting a candidate to the congregation (this phase may take 6-12 months)
- The Presbytery or COM vote on the candidate's membership in the Presbytery
- The congregation votes on the candidate
- The pastor begins service