

How is God Calling Your Congregation?

A Guide for Discerning Congregational Mission Focus

This guide is designed for the congregational mission or outreach committee. It is meant to help your committee take a closer look at congregational mission involvement, evaluate its current work and begin to discern its call in God's mission. The suggested activities will take a minimum of four and possibly six or more hours depending on the size of your congregation, the number of mission activities in which your congregation is involved, and how many people are on the mission committee.

Instructions:

1. Take time to **read through this guide first.** Is the suggested order what is called for?
2. This guide moves through several suggested sessions. Consider the following order and allotted time blocks for each session and adjust as needed depending on the number of activities and people involved in your congregation's mission work:
 - 60-90 minutes: **Getting started and Understanding who we are and how we are called**
 - 60 minutes: **Exploring the "how" of our mission activities**
 - 60-90 minutes: **Reflecting on our mission engagement**
 - 45-60 minutes: **Mapping our mission work**
 - 60 minutes: **Bringing it all together**
3. **Note:** we recommend including an additional 20-30 minutes for Bible study and prayer at the beginning of each session, and time to conclude with prayer.

I. Getting started: what are our mission values?

First, it is important to set a foundation for FAITHFUL and EFFECTIVE mission involvement. Consider using the "**PARTNERS**" acrostic below or another set of "mission values" and review how your mission activities affirm each statement or value. If some do not, it may be important to explore the health of those mission efforts. See the "mission committee toolkit" [evaluation template](#) for another model you could use to name "values" for your congregation's mission work.

Participation is broad, inviting people of all ages and backgrounds to engage meaningfully.

Activities are faith-rooted, determined through commitment to prayer, study and discernment.

Roles are mutual, where mission participants and recipients share equal footing.

Timing is long-range, aiming to address root causes of social issues.

Needs are researched and the most effective tools for addressing those needs are identified.

Effectiveness is evaluated, reflecting a mutually agreed-upon rubric of faithfulness and success.

Relationships are primary, focusing on personal relationships, partnership and transformation.

Success is sustainable, measured by a partner's ability to continue independently.

II. Understanding who we are and how we are called

Next, *look inward* as a community to discern how your congregation is called to engage in mission. Oftentimes, congregational mission efforts represent a hodge-podge of individual interests, rather than a communal sense of God's call. Because of this, mission committees often find themselves juggling multiple mission projects, none of which are well-supported. Congregations that FOCUS their mission – truly discerning God's call and narrowing their efforts – often find their work is better supported, more meaningful and simpler to communicate.

As you begin your congregation's discernment, THINK, LEARN, PRAY & PAY ATTENTION:

THINK: As you begin your discernment path, consider the following questions:

- Where and with whom does your congregation already have connections, both near and far?
 - In what ways and with which communities is your congregation already involved in mission?
 - Where are people in your community from? Where are members in your congregation from?
 - Does your church have historic connections to mission in a particular place?
 - What local mission efforts does your congregation engage in?

- Is your congregation part of the PC(USA) vision to become a Matthew 25 Church? This is work aimed at eradicating systemic poverty, dismantling structural racism and building congregational vitality. To join the initiative or learn more, go to pcusa.org/matthew25.

- What does your congregation bring to mission involvement (gifts and needs)?
 - What makes your congregation unique?
 - What skills do members of your congregation have to share?
 - What is missing in the life of your congregation?

- What burdens are on the hearts of people in your congregation?
 - Is there a concern for a particular place in the world?
 - Are there concerns about communities impacted by specific issues such as hunger and food security, climate change, natural disasters, gun violence, human trafficking or migration?

LEARN: As you continue your discernment, gather information, such as:

- Where are there global or local communities seeking partnership? What might such a partnership look like? *Contact your presbytery office for local guidance or your denominational mission offices to explore a global partnership.*

- Where are other congregations in your community engaged in mission? *Contact your presbytery office and/or local ecumenical partners to learn of their involvement.*

- What needs do potential partners perceive in their community? *Contact your presbytery office, denominational mission offices, mission workers or global church connections to learn more.*

- ☑ How do the members of your congregation believe themselves to be called? *Contact your church leaders or denominational research offices to design a survey or listening process for your congregation.*
- ☑ How do the members of your community believe your congregation is called? *Contact your church leaders or denominational offices to design a survey or listening process for your community partners.*

PRAY: As you continue in discernment, commit to one or more of the following:

- ☑ Gather monthly for prayer in community using a process like Lectio Divina to hear God's Word.
- ☑ Invite church members to commit to daily prayer, Scripture reading and silence.
- ☑ Encourage church leaders to integrate prayer for discernment into weekly worship services.
- ☑ Looking to Quaker tradition, organize a "clearness committee" for your mission committee. Invite a small, trusted group to engage your committee by asking honest questions about your congregation's sense of call and process of discernment.

PAY ATTENTION: Along your discernment journey, note these signs of God's calling:

- ☑ God's Peace: A sense of confidence at a very deep level that indicates you are moving in the right direction.
- ☑ Joy: A sense of energy that indicates the presence of the Spirit.
- ☑ Persistence: A message or notion keeps coming to your group from different places and in various ways.
- ☑ Convergence: A sense that the various questions or pieces of information suddenly come together and make sense.
- ☑ Fruitfulness: A sense of encouragement – be it ever so small – along the way.

III. Exploring the “how” of our mission activities

Now that you have considered *what* you feel called to do, consider the “how” of mission, or *the ways in which* your community feels called to be engaged. Mission efforts can be lived out in several “modes,” each of which might resonate differently with individual gifts and talents.

Consider how your congregation is serving in one or more of these “modes” of mission:

Mode of Mission Involvement	Hands-on	Empowered Partners	Advocacy
Objective	Meet immediate and perceived needs of others by provision of goods, services and training	Develop relationships with partner communities and, with them, identify and seek to overcome causes of needs and injustice	In solidarity with partner communities and members, seek humane community development and just structures and systems
Theological Basis	Deut. 15:7-11: “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land” Matt. 25:31-46: “For I was hungry and you gave me food”	John 13:16 “Servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them” 1 Corinthians 3:5-9 “For we are God’s servants, working together”	Proverbs 31:8-9 “Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy”
Relationships & Focus	Serving others to meet basic needs	Partnering with others for quality-of-life changes	Solidarity with others for structural and personal justice and change

IV. Reflecting on our mission engagement

The next activity will entail “mapping” the congregation’s mission involvement. Before you start the mapping exercise on the next page, reflect on these questions:

- **What are the priorities** of your congregational mission work?
→ Review your responses to the “THINK” questions in the session on “Understanding who we are.”
- **Where is there energy** in congregational mission? Which mission activities are high priority?
- **Is there a convergence** *between* activities? For example, do several of the activities involve children? Are there multiple activities addressing hunger issues?
- **Who is involved** in the activities? Adults? Youth? Children? Three individuals? The whole mission committee? A larger group of the congregation? Is broad engagement important or not?
- **“How” do you engage in the work?** Consider the “modes” on page three (above).
- **Which mission activities are part of the Matthew 25 initiative?**
Consider these questions to determine whether your congregation is engaged in Matthew 25:

- Are you doing **work to address root causes of poverty?** [Read more here.](#)
There are structures in our society that all but guarantee that people living in poverty will stay that way. Systemic poverty refers to the economic exploitation of people who are poor through laws, policies, practices and systems that perpetuate their impoverished status. Poverty is complex and overlaps with many other social ills and oppressive structures in our society.
- Are you doing **work to address and dismantle structural racism?** [Read more here.](#)
Racism is not primarily about individual prejudice or an individual’s beliefs and attitudes. Rather, racism in the U.S. is a socially constructed system. Some people are advantaged, and others are disadvantaged, merely because of their skin color, ethnic identity or their ancestral background. Social power and prejudice have combined to treat people differently, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Some people are privileged while others are oppressed. Consequently, there is unequal and inequitable access to resources such as money, education, information and decision-making power.
- Are you doing work to **build congregational vitality?** [Read more here.](#)
You might think that the vitality of a congregation or worshiping community is based on the number of members, the scope of programs, the size of financial gifts or some other statistics. Not so — at least not entirely. Rather, a community’s vitality is primarily its spiritual strength and its capacity for purposeful mission. Congregational vitality is evident in a worshiping community when its structural systems, finances and discipleship practices are aligned in such a way that the community is actively engaged in the mission of God in their local community and the world, and they are powerfully focused on growing as disciples in the way of Jesus Christ. Faith comes alive when we boldly engage God’s mission and share the hope we have in Christ.



If you are not engaged in the Matthew 25 initiative and want to learn more about it, [read this two-page document for next steps and a guide to resources.](#)

V. Mapping our mission work

Instructions:

1. **Pause to think** through all that you've already reflected on regarding values, priorities and modes.
2. **Plot your mission efforts and activities.** In the table below, plot out congregational mission work according to focus (e.g. education, poverty, hunger) and note the "mode" of mission in which the congregation is involved in each (hands-on, empowered partners, advocacy).
An example is found in the first row.
3. **Note which activities have been life-giving.** Circle the efforts that have been the most life-giving for your congregation.
4. **Mark growth areas.** Underline the efforts that have the most potential for growth.
5. **Reflect on the Matthew 25 vision.** Reflecting on the Matthew 25 initiative and using the colors of the logo on page four, highlight mission activities that help build congregational vitality in green. Highlight mission activities that help dismantle structural racism in orange. Highlight mission activities that help eradicate systemic poverty in blue.
6. **Review and reflect.** Review the first steps of this document again and make notes in the right-hand column.
 - What observations do you have about each area of mission in relation to your discernment and reflection?
 - Do the activities align with mission values or principles? These could be the "PARTNERS" principles for mission involvement on page one, your congregation's mission values, the "principles" for how "[Presbyterian Do Mission in Partnership](#)" or others.
7. **Consider new questions and ideas.** Are there ways we might align more with Matthew 25? Are there new modes or efforts to explore?

Area of Mission	Hands-on	Empowered Partners	Advocacy	Notes and observations
Example: Hunger	Food bank	Community partnership to address homelessness and food security. <u>Community garden.</u>	Addressing root causes and systemic racism through advocacy efforts re: SNAP benefits and protocols.	The food bank does not involve community partners. Advocacy efforts are carried out together with a community advocacy group.

VI. Bringing it all together

After thinking, learning, praying, discerning and mapping, take a step back. What do you see?

As a community, take intentional time to reflect on what can be learned from these activities.

- What calls our attention as we move through this process?
- Which “modes” of mission are dominant?
- What are our mission priorities?
- Which values stand out?
- What new ideas are emerging? What sparks our imagination or causes us to ask questions?
- Where do we see natural connection points with the “What,” “How,” “Who,” “Why” or “Where” of mission?
- Where might changes or adjustments in existing mission activities need to be made?
- What opportunities do we sense for new ways to engage in God’s mission?
- How is God calling our congregation in God’s mission?

As you seek to focus your mission efforts, keep in mind that this is a journey. There is no perfect “mission destination” or even a “mission map” that you are working toward. Your congregation is a dynamic community, always changing as it faces new times and discovers new opportunities. Similarly, your mission efforts are dynamic. It is the task and the calling of the mission committee to stay in touch with this dynamic growth and lead the church in continuing to discern the call that God is placing upon it.

As you journey, take deep breaths, surround yourselves with prayer, and don’t feel the need to rush the process.

**Questions? Need additional resources or want to connect with a mission co-worker?
Don’t hesitate to call or write:**

Resources:

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