



Mission Study Guidelines

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Introduction to the Mission Study: FAQs

What is a Mission Study?

A Mission Study is a 6- to 9-month study that a congregation undertakes to discern where the Spirit is leading them for their next season of ministry.

Why should we do a Mission Study?

One of the eternal and undeniable truths about God's people is that we stray. We regularly get distracted or complacent.¹ Our Reformed heritage is rooted in the ministries of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and others who realized that, in certain areas of faith and practice, the Church had strayed significantly from what (it said) it believed. The Reformation gave birth to a slogan: *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*, or "The Church reformed, always being reformed." The second half of this slogan reminds the Church that we are in constant need of reformation. Being faithful means acknowledging this truth, regularly examining our lives and practices, and asking the Holy Spirit to correct, re-direct, and shepherd us afresh on the mission to which God has called us. A Mission Study is a process and a tool that a healthy church uses to regularly clarify God's call and measure the congregation's fidelity to that call (G-2.0301).

When should we do a Mission Study?

While there is never a bad time to conduct a Mission Study, there are at least four occasions when presbytery recommends a congregation perform a Mission Study:

- Before beginning a search for a new pastor/associate pastor²
- In order to assess the health of the congregation
- When more than 7 years have passed since your last Mission Study
- Following trauma, conflict, or significant change in the congregation

¹ [Examples from Scripture]; the Church Life Cycle (appendix A) illustrates this dynamic from several different perspectives.

² Aside from its benefits to the congregation, the Mission Study Report assists the Transitional Relations Committee when responding to a congregation's request to form a PNC (or APNC).

What if we recently completed a Mission Study?

If you just did one, it may not be necessary to perform another one. However, the presbytery may ask you to complete a new one, especially if the congregation has experienced trauma, conflict, or significant change.

Who conducts the Mission Study?

The Session appoints a Mission Study Team (MST) to conduct the Mission Study. Usually this is a team of five to seven people drawn from the Session and the congregation. There is also usually an advisor who has experience and/or training in performing a Mission Study. For most congregations this will be the Interim Pastor.³ If you are conducting a study without an Interim Pastor, please contact the COM through the Presbytery office as we may have resources to assist you.

Do we have to pause other church activities during the Mission Study?

Not at all. Although the MST will schedule a few events involving the entire congregation, team members will perform much of the research and study. Of course, it's a good idea for the MST to designate a specific member to be in frequent communication with the church administrator (or whoever maintains the church calendar) so as to avoid scheduling conflicts.

How long will the Mission Study take?

A congregation should plan to devote six to nine months to its Mission Study. Depending on recent events and/or present circumstances in the congregation, it may take even longer. While this may strike some people as overly long, a glance at what's involved will help one understand that this is a reasonable amount of time. In addition, the church must keep in mind that:

- 1) members of the MST are volunteers, with other responsibilities.
- 2) few (if any) of the MST members have conducted a Mission Study before. While the learning curve may not be terribly steep, neither is it simple "common sense."
- 3) Congregational involvement is an essential ingredient of an accurate and reliable Mission Study. Anyone who has led a church event knows that coordinating the involvement and schedules of dozens (if not hundreds) of church members - not to

³ In the Presbytery of the James, the Interim Pastor's contract stipulates that they are a MST member *ex officio*, serving as an advisor.

mention the church's own calendar - is far more easily said than done. It will take time.

- 4) The product of the Mission Study – the Report – will require not only people to write it, but also for the MST to edit it together and make sure that members agree with what is eventually set down on paper. (This may, um, require more than one meeting).

These are just a few considerations among many. The truth is, six to nine months only seems like a long time to someone who *expects* a shorter time (the next section addresses managing people's expectations). Alternatively, if people expected a Mission Study to take two years, and were told it would only be six to nine months, they would be relieved and grateful.

“Well Begun is Half Done” – Preparing for the Mission Study

Professional house painters will tell you that 30% or more of a quality paint job is the preparation. No amount of painting skill or technique can compensate for poor surface preparation. It's the same with a Mission Study: preparation is key. While this guide and your Interim Pastor (or Mission Study consultant) can direct you to resources and help you with analysis and writing the report, they are not in a position to prepare the congregation. They don't have years' worth of relationships with the congregation, and they don't enjoy the same level of trust as the church elders. Preparing the congregation for Mission Study is the responsibility of the Session and other members of influence. If the congregation is to be meaningfully engaged, it will be because the leaders they know and trust have helped them to understand why it's important, and have led by example in their own engagement.

Managing Expectations

A common impediment to conducting a quality Mission Study is lack of congregational engagement. Too often members approach the Mission Study expecting that 1) it will require yet more of their precious time, 2) it will interfere with the church ministries *they're* involved with, 3) it's not actually going to produce anything of value, 4) as soon as it's written it will be filed away on a top shelf in the church office closet and never again see the light of day, and 5) the only reason the church is “jumping through this hoop” anyway is so it can get on with electing a PNC and finding their permanent pastor.

In other words, congregants frequently bring these expectations to a Mission Study:

1. It will take way too long
2. It will compete with my ministry/committee
3. It's not worth my time
4. It's a waste of paper
5. It's just another bureaucratic hoop to jump through

These expectations may not be shared out loud, or at all. Folks may not even realize they have these expectations. Unless these expectations are managed early on by the MST or by the church and staff as a whole, the quality of input from the congregation - regardless of the MST's diligence and effort - will be suboptimal. Those expectations – like gutter bumpers in a bowling alley – will guide the process and ensure that they *are* fulfilled: the Mission Study will take up too much time, will compete with other church activities, be a waste of our time and resources and, in the end, useless.

So how does one go about conducting a Mission Study that people think is worthy of their time and effort, is helpful to leadership and the congregation moving forward, and will provide fresh insights and recommendations that will strengthen and refresh the church and its ministry?

It begins with church leadership and good quality communication.

Start With Why

After members of the MST are appointed, the Session should schedule a morning or afternoon with them to establish the goals and the expectations of the Mission Study, as well as the responsibilities of each party. These goals and expectations need to be rooted in the purpose of the Mission Study – i.e., Why are we doing one? Authors and researchers like Simon Sinek⁴, John Kotter⁵ and Rick Warren⁶ have recognized the fundamental importance of articulating purpose. Without a clearly- established purpose and a shared understanding, people will form their own reasons and motivations for doing a project. Those motivations will, in turn, shape people's engagement and performance, even when the task is clearly

⁴ Simon Sinek, Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action (New York: Portfolio/Penguin Random House, 2011)

⁵ John Kotter, Leading Change (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012)

⁶ Rick Warren, The Purpose-Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Mission (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/HarperCollins, 2010)

stated. For example, a parent may tell a child to clean their room. The task is clear. Yet the parent may tell one child they must do so because their room is messy, and tell another child they must clean their room before cellphone privileges will be restored. While the task is the same in both instances, the reasons for doing so will have a distinct effect upon the child's motivation – and performance. Their motivation will determine the energy, focus and commitment the child brings to the task.

The Session and the MST need to be of one voice about the purposes of the Mission Study, both so that they can maintain focus, and so that they can communicate those purposes to the congregation. Once people are clear about the purposes of the Mission Study, it's much easier to shape and manage expectations.⁷ To some extent, the purposes will vary from church to church, depending on what has gone before (trauma, retirement, etc.). At minimum, however, it's important to keep the Mission Study's three primary purposes in front of everyone:

- To review the church's current position honestly and comprehensively (e.g., demographics, financials, etc.)
- To reflect thoughtfully and prayerfully on the nature of the church's context (neighborhood / city /country)⁸, especially how it has changed in recent years
- To hear what the Spirit is saying to us today

In other words, **1) Who Are We? 2) Who is Our Neighbor? and 3) Why Are We Here?** Or, more precisely, Why has God chosen to position us in this place, at this time?

Underlying these three main purposes are several truths to keep in mind, and to share with the congregation:

- A healthy church regularly reflects upon its ministries and its mission. The stories of God's people in scripture remind us not only that we regularly wander off course, but God is constantly seeking to return us to the path prepared for us.
- Every year brings change. To continue fulfilling our mission, we need to address that change thoughtfully, prayerfully, and intentionally.
- This process "primes" us – prepares and equips us – to identify new and emerging ministry possibilities where God may be calling us.

⁷ This doesn't mean that everyone in the congregation needs to agree with those purposes. There will always be outliers, naysayers and Doubting Thomases. But so long as leadership clearly and consistently articulates the purposes of the Mission Study, they are much better equipped to respond to questions about it.

⁸ Acts 1:8

The recommendations you make will be informed by data and guided by the Spirit, and not simply be reflections of members' personal opinions. You will be better equipped to answer questions about your decisions, and better able to respond to concerns raised by "squeaky wheels" in the congregation.

Session and the Mission Study

Even though Session is not the body conducting the Mission Study, it has an important role to play. As the Ruling Elders for the congregation, they will set the tone by 1) regularly reminding the congregation of the Study's purpose and importance; 2) frequently communicating its support for the Mission Study; and 3) encouraging the congregation's full participation. In addition to setting the tone, the Session also keeps the congregation informed and focused by regularly reminding the congregation:

- Of the "3 Questions" (p. 7) to the congregation
- How the MST's activities are designed to help the church answer these questions
- That, when engaged sincerely and prayerfully, this process will help the congregation discern God's path for the near future, and begin walking that path.

Positive Expectations

With this information in mind, how might you reframe the "default" expectations (p.4) that a congregant brings to the Mission Study?

1. **~~It will take way too long.~~** It can be helpful to ask oneself, "How long is too long?" The necessity of seeking the Spirit's direction for our lives is not in question. The question we face is how much time should the church devote to this endeavor? Experience over the years has shown that 6-9 months is a reasonable length of time to devote to this process, so it's important to budget sufficient time to do it well. Particularly since people aren't "on site" 40 hours a week (as with an organization), this process could easily take a year. However, leadership has discussed this matter and agreed to this target.
2. **~~It will compete with my ministry/committee.~~** One of our aims is to determine how best to align our ministries with our *current* realities and mission. Each of us has a responsibility to the congregation to pursue our ministries in the most effective and faithful way possible. The Mission Study is a way to ensure that we're doing this. After all, while your committee's responsibility may be to keep current the church's

website and social media presence, no one is served by using a dial-up modem when broadband is available. We're asking you to help us determine how to move our ministries forward given our current situation.

3. ~~**It's Not Worth My Time.**~~ This sentiment often arises from a person's experience with a previous (poorly executed) Mission Study. A wise person once said, "If it's worth doing, it's worth doing well." Devoting much time and effort to a process, only to see the results of that effort ignored, is a surefire recipe for disappointment and cynicism. For this reason it's incumbent upon leadership not only to support the congregation throughout the Mission Study, but also to begin thinking early in the process about how it will be able to make good, faithful, and positive use of the findings and recommendations in the report. Regularly remind the congregation that their input and engagement is vital to a meaningful Mission Study.
4. ~~**It's a waste of paper.**~~ Any Mission Study that is incomplete, half-baked, or poorly undertaken, deserves to sit on a shelf (or put in the recycling bin). But your church's Mission Study will have sufficient thought, prayer, engagement, congregational input, community analysis, and scriptural grounding to be of considerable help to the church, to its Session and to its next pastor. In addition, it will include recommendations to help the congregation measure its progress in the years to come. It will be a living document – not just something that fills a three-ring binder.
5. ~~**It's just another bureaucratic hoop to jump through.**~~ This couldn't be further from the truth. Most church MIFs, using a variety of words and phrases, end up communicating to a candidate, "We want someone to lead us to the next place" – without any idea of what that "next place" might be. Ambiguity and aimlessness do not benefit a pastoral search. From time to time, however, a church publishes a MIF that says, "WE are the church, and God is calling us to THIS ministry. We're looking for someone to shepherd and guide us along THIS path." These words communicate that the church is not expecting the pastor to define the church. Rather, they know who they are and where God has called them, and seek a pastor who will help guide them along that path. This is the basis for a strong and fruitful ministry together – and it begins with the congregation doing the necessary work of the Mission Study.

“I Am Doing a New Thing”

Lastly, honestly *expect* to be surprised by the Spirit, to have your eyes opened to something new. Joseph’s eyes were opened to the true purposes of providence in his life (Gen 50:20); Esther realized that hers was a larger purpose than she had imagined (Esther 4:16); Job’s eyes were opened to a cosmic reality far greater than his own (Job 42:1-6); Elizabeth was given to see the truth surrounding her cousin’s unborn child (Luke 1:41ff.); Peter was crushed to realize the truth of Jesus’ prophecy (Matt 26:75), and later dumbfounded by the unorthodox breadth of God’s grace (Acts 10:28).

God is always seeking to make God’s self and God’s will known to us, because God loves us far more than we can ever know, and wants us to enjoy the life offered to us through Christ. Our natural tendency as flawed human beings is to settle on what works and then cling to the familiar, even when we begin to see that it no longer serves its original purpose. It is we who must be intentional about seeking God’s will to move forward. God is faithful, and God’s mercies are new every morning (Lam. 3:23).

Conducting the Mission Study

Now that we are “well begun,” let’s take a closer look at the steps involved. The Mission Study consists of five main phases:

I. Preparation

Session

MST

Congregation

II. Gathering Information

	Congregation	Community	Calling
Who ⁹	Demographic Analysis	Demographic Analysis	Scripture Study & Reading
What	Ministries Analysis	Cultural Analysis	Prayer
Where	Congregational Survey	Visitation & Engagement	Discussion

III. Analyzing & Interpreting the Data

IV. Making Recommendations

V. Writing the Report

1) Orientation: Seeking God

We will rely on our saying again, “Well begun is half done!” A faithful and effective Mission Study is grounded in seeking God’s will for the next season in the life of your congregation. Session appoints a team (committee) to conduct the Mission Study. The Mission Study Team (MST) is responsible for designing each step of the Mission Study and then implementing it.

⁹ See p. 13, “II. Gathering Information”

2) Appoint Mission Study Team (MST)

The Session appoints a team (committee) to conduct the Mission Study. The Mission Study Team (which shall be referred to as MST for the rest of this document) is responsible for designing each step of the Mission Study and then implementing it.

3) Demographic Study Of Community

Part of the process of understanding what work God has to do for us in a certain time and place is getting to know the needs of the community to which we minister. As part of the assessment of the community a demographic study is to be conducted, in order to understand who our neighbors are now and who they probably will be in the coming years.

The goal is to learn about the community to which we minister is to interview community leaders about what they perceive as the needs of the community. This is often an eye-opening experience for the congregation.

4) Congregational Survey and Gatherings

A survey of the congregation, about who they are and what they desire in the church, is an effective tool for getting a decent amount of information from many members and presenting it in a single report. Again, we often think we know what everyone in the church thinks but we rarely ask them and are often surprised by the results when we do. This includes financial review, member demographics, property review, ministry review, etc. As a means to gather information the MST will design a way for members of the congregation to gather for 8-12 hours in total.

5) Written Report Done by Committee, Approved by Session and Reviewed by COM (*if writing a MIF*)

After the Congregational Gatherings, the MST will continue to develop the ideas gathered from the congregation and write the Mission Study Report.

6) Report Presented to Congregation

Once both the Session and COM have reviewed the Mission Study Report, it should be presented to the congregation. Copies of the report should be available to the congregation.

7) Session Implements Recommendations of Report

At the next meeting of the Session after its review by COM, the Session should begin to decide how to use the Mission Study and how to implement the new Vision with its Goals and Objectives.

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I. Preparation

The reasons for thorough preparation were covered earlier (pp. 5-10). The steps are:

- A. **Session Training** – The Interim Pastor / presbytery advisor is primarily responsible for this task.

- B. **MST Selection and Training** – At the same time, Session (in cooperation with the Interim Pastor or POJ Advisor) will determine who it will ask to serve as members of the Mission Study Team (the MST is a committee of the Session). We suggest five people, though it may be as few as three for small churches, but no more than seven for larger churches.
 1. The MST should include at least one member of Session, though the majority of the Team should not currently be serving on Session.
 2. Session should consider the entire congregation when choosing potential members. It will be helpful if at least one MST member has skills in the following areas: writing; public speaking; expertise or familiarity with handling and processing data; Biblical literacy; and ease in leading group prayer. In addition, all MST members should be “team players” who will prayerfully consider what others have to say, and who will honestly share their own thoughts; people who appreciate the church’s traditions and history, while also being open to change – even significant change; and people who fully understand and accept the commitment of time and effort this Study will require, and can resist the urge to rush things.
 3. The Interim Pastor or POJ Advisor shall be an *ex officio* member of the MST.
 4. Members of the MST shall elect a moderator or chair, as well as a secretary to record notes.

Once Session has appointed the Team, they should read this Guide and come to their first meeting prepared to draft an outline of the process. This outline should include timelines, in conversation with the calendar of church activities scheduled for the

coming year. During this stage the Interim Pastor / POJ Advisor will help get the MST “up and running.”

NOTE: If the church has a copy of a previous Mission Study, the POJ recommends the MST refrain from reviewing it until the MST has concluded the “Gathering Information” phase. The primary aim of the Mission Study is to discern the church’s identity and mission today, not what people thought it was in the past. If, after concluding its own research, the MST reviews earlier Reports and discovers important and relevant information, it can discuss how that information affects their analysis, and whether to incorporate it into their own Report.

C. **Congregational Orientation** - Drawing on the FAQs and the Well-Begun sections above, Session should develop a plan for educating the congregation about the Mission Study.

1. Clearly communicate the Session’s positive expectations. This is particularly important at the beginning.
2. Make a schedule to communicate (and repeat!) information frequently through print media, electronically, online, and in person.
3. Remind people that the roots of our Presbyterian faith lay in Luther’s and Calvin’s realization that the Church needed reform; it was engaging in ministries that, over the years, had evolved to serve itself rather than God.
4. Make use of scripture to show how this is in keeping with the pattern of God’s people regularly returning to God.

II. Gathering Information

The most time-intensive stage of the Mission Study is Gathering Information. The Study focuses on three areas: **Congregation** (Who Are We?), **Community** (Who Is Our Neighbor?), and **Calling** (Why Are We Here?). In researching each area, one could say that the Study focuses broadly on three categories: people’s *identity*, *activity*, and *direction* – or **Who**, **What** and **Where**. Again, this is a broad characterization; they are not meant to exclude data, and you will find that the categories overlap. Still, they may help you maintain a general focus for your research

There is no fixed timeline or sequence for this stage of the study. Some MSTs “divide and conquer,” assigning each of the areas to specific team members; others choose to use the timeline as their guide, shifting assignments as the situation changes; still others assign certain tasks to people across the areas (e.g., one person handles all the demographic research). The only “correct” way is whichever way works best for your team.

A. Congregation (3 parts)

1. **Demographic Analysis** (Who) - The Demographic Analysis focuses on historical information and congregational demographics to illustrate the congregation's identity today, and over time.
 - a. **History** – for this section, tell a story. Focus on events that have shaped the congregation. Reports that contain only a timeline of pastors and construction projects are of little utility here.
 - i. Don't gloss over challenges and trials; they often have a greater effect upon the church than the celebrations. At the same time, there's no need to go granular. Be both honest and prudent.
 - ii. Should you want to include pastoral and/or construction timelines, it may be useful to include them in an appendix and simply reference them here.
 - b. **Congregational Demographics** – This section contains such information as membership levels, attendance levels, members' ages, marital status, racial/ethnic make-up, etc. The good news is that most of this data can easily be found in the Annual Reports that your clerk files with the denomination each year.
2. **Ministries Analysis** (What) This is a “granular look” at the components of your congregation. When gathering this data, resist the temptation to confirm existing assumptions and biases. Rather, enter this with an open mind – or maybe with a bias to challenging those assumptions. It can be helpful to involve in this process at least one person who is relatively new to the congregation; a new set of eyes often sees things that the rest of us have learned to ignore, or take for granted.
3. **Congregational Survey** (Where) – These are essential to the work of a Mission Study, not only because of the data they can yield, but also (and sometimes more importantly) because they are tangible signs to the congregation that they and their thoughts about TPC will be a vital part of the Mission Study. The Transitional Pastor has several resources to assist with this process; more can be found by googling “Congregational Survey.” The MST can use surveys and questions:
 - To “take the temperature” of the congregation at present (hopes, fears, joys, disappointments, etc.)
 - To help surface issues from the congregation's past that remain unaddressed

- To ascertain what values are important to the congregation
- To ascertain what “things” (i.e., physical objects) are important to the congregation
- To learn how the congregation understands its identity and its purpose
- To learn what the congregation believes about the community
- To assess how the congregation might react to change

This list is not exhaustive; the MST may find it helpful to ask the congregation certain questions earlier in the process and then, based on their data analysis and interpretation, conduct a second survey to go deeper in areas they deem important, and to address previously-unexamined issues that have come to light.

Coming up with good, useful questions is both art and science. Many online survey services today will administer their surveys for free; the trade-off is that they get your anonymized data, for their own research purposes. The MST may want to come up with its own questions. If so, you want to maximize congregational participation while also getting quality data. Keep the following factors in mind:

- Think carefully about how the answers to survey questions will (or won't) help the Study. Too many questions will frighten off some people, and there are some things we might like to know that aren't actually useful. Start by clarifying what you want to know and why you want to know it. For example, A question such as “Are you willing to assist with childcare during the worship service?”
- Realize and accept the fact that, for the most part, people's thoughts and opinions will be heavily influenced, if not actually restricted, by their experience. For most of your respondents, their only experience with the Church is in context that is denominational and 20th-century.
- Consider how you will administer the survey.

Multiple choice questions are easier to tabulate, but force a respondent to choose among pre-determined answers. Conversely, short-answer questions allow the respondent to express themselves more fully, but are harder to quantify for purposes of analysis. Aim for a mix.

B. Community (3 parts)

1. **Demographic Analysis** (Who) - The MST will research the community where God has placed the congregation. Much of this research is usually accomplished using a demographic study/analysis prepared by a commercial vendor who specializes in this service.¹⁰ These analyses collate publicly-available data from a wide variety of sources to present information on a population within a specific geographic area with respect to ages, genders, marital status, education levels, population density, employment types and levels, political leanings, faith preferences, church engagement, religious beliefs, leisure activities, and many other characteristics.
2. **Cultural Analysis** (What/Where) – This is one of the most important, and perhaps also most unnerving, part of the Mission Study. It is important because North American culture in the 21st century has undergone significant and fundamental change, and particular with respect to the church’s place in society. And it’s unnerving because, for the first time since European explorers and settlers arrived on this continent, The Church – as far as much of society is concerned – has become irrelevant. One cannot overstate the importance of this fact to the conduct, findings, and recommendations of the Mission Study. We are greatly hindered in this endeavor by the fact that ALL our experience of “church” has been in a modern and post-modern 20th-century context. NONE of us has significant experience (if any) of thriving as a mainline congregation in the 21st century. All of our ideas, suggestions, proposals, visions, etc. are firmly grounded in a culture that no longer exists. This is not a moral judgment – it’s just a fact. In order to *move forward*, we must relinquish the quixotic quest to preserve the past, and instead boldly explore this new world where God’s Spirit is, indeed, quite active. Honest exploration requires us to set aside our assumptions (based on our past experience) about what will work and what others like, and instead be intentional about opening our eyes to a new culture where Church is never more than just an option (and often less desirable than spending the weekend camping, or at the beach, or even half-listening to a Zoomed service at the kitchen table while drinking your second cup of coffee and trying to keep the kids from fighting).

This phenomenon has been studied and written about since at least the 1990’s, and there are countless books, magazine articles, blog posts, etc. addressing it. The seminary library has shelves full of books on the topic. A Google search

¹⁰ See Appendix 3, “Research Resources”

(in 2023) turns up 67 million hits. Yet most of our congregations are only vaguely aware of this development, and few (if any) have taken the time to explore the implications of this development for their own congregation. Rather, most are simply hoping that the Church they have always known will just – *continue*. This, despite the stream of reports documenting an inexorable loss of members in the denomination, along with a just-as-inexorable rise in the number of church closings. We do not know, and have not been taught, how to flourish and minister as a church in 21st-century North America – *because no one has ever done this before*. (Remember people saying, “Well, we’ve never had to do this during a pandemic before”?)

In this respect, the MST is an invaluable instrument in the hands of the Spirit to help the Church see the world as it is today, and discern the path God has prepared in this new world. To you has been given the task of scouting out this new land and reporting back to leadership (see Numbers 13-14 for an excellent – and cautionary – parallel to our own situation). The Mission Study was initially conceived of as an aid to preparing a congregation to call a new pastor, an “updating” designed to help members conduct ministries, perhaps to stimulate changes in staff configuration, and to inform the writing of the MIF. These all remain valid purposes. But by far the greatest and most important responsibility of the MST is to help re-orient the congregation to this new reality, and help them to discern God’s path in this new land. Indeed, nothing the MST can do will prepare the congregation more fully and effectively to call a new pastor than this “exegesis of culture.” Absent this analysis, your congregation will continue to assume that your church and your neighbors are the same people we were 30 years ago, with the same priorities as 30 years ago, inhabiting the same world as 30 years ago – *simply because that’s the only reference point they have*. Your work can help lay the groundwork for a new chapter in your congregation’s life.

3. **Visitation & Engagement** (What/Where) – As important as it is to read and learn about this new culture, it is even more important to spend time in it. Now, this is not to suggest that you have been living in your bedroom for the last 20 years. Of course you have been living and functioning in the world this whole time. Nevertheless, it has been primarily, if not exclusively, a world of your own making.¹¹ We largely choose where we will work, with whom we will eat, how we will spend our time and our money, etc. These choices naturally form and inform our perspectives and opinions. It’s also

¹¹ See David Foster Wallace’s Kenyon College 1985 Commencement Address, “This Is Water,” for a profound (and humorous) meditation on this truth: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ms2BvRbjOYo>

true, generally speaking, that we tend to associate with people who are like us. While there's nothing necessarily wrong with that, it leaves us with limited understanding of, and insight into, the lives of people who are NOT like us. For example, people who consider church and/or faith to be unimportant. Or people whose life situation makes attending Sunday morning worship a practical impossibility. Or people who would like to attend church but can't afford the extra gas, or bus fare. Or people whose early love for the church was twisted and poisoned by abuse from a church leader. These are the people who are not coming to your church. These are the folks to whom God is sending God's people. These are the residents of this new, un-churched age, for whom the traditional way of engaging with God are not options – but who nevertheless are loved by God, and yearn for the true fellowship of God's Spirit.

“But if traditional practices don't work with such people, what will?” Exactly. This is what you've been asked to learn, and to share with the congregation. And while it's necessary to learn about this new culture, the answer to this question must be grounded in actual lived experience with others. With neighbors. “What will I say? What questions should I or shouldn't I ask?” Don't paralyze yourself by overthinking it. You're simply meeting some new people. Making new friends. Learning about them – what's important to them, what they like and don't like, etc. NOTE: this is *not* about persuading people to visit or join your church. That should be the furthest thing from your mind. Rather, remember Philippians 2:3ff. and, like our Lord, approach your neighbors humbly, as a servant, with their interests in mind. The Bible is a story about Going. Numerous times God tells God's people to go – somewhere (Gen 12:1-3; Ex 3:10; Jonah; Matt 28:16-20; etc.). Jesus is our example: He left heaven to go to earth; he left Nazareth to go minister to the Jews; he left the Mount of Transfiguration to go to his passion and death in Jerusalem. Even our liturgy ends by acknowledging that, as God's people, we are sent by God to go forth into the world.¹² Visiting with neighbors may seem unnatural, simply because that's not the traditional way, the way we've done it in the past. But it is a cornerstone of the church, and one we must practice if we are to discern how the Spirit is moving today among people who are not in the church – or at least, not in our church.

To be clear, these visits need not be limited to members of the MST. If they wish, the MST could design a framework for other members (Session? Deacons? Elders and deacons not currently serving?) to conduct some of

¹² PCUSA Book of Common Worship (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 33.

these visits. So long as people steer clear of “recruiting new church members,” there are a number of ways to approach this. But the bottom line is that you are seeking to know and love your neighbors. And the Mission Study is not complete if it does not include this component.

C. Calling (3 parts)

1. **Scripture Study & Reading** - The fundamental question grounding the study is, “What is God’s will for us today?” Yet this is often the one that suffers from lack of attention. We tend to default to the “corporate” practice: do the research, perform the analysis, publish the results, and present our recommendations. Unfortunately, this practice excludes the single most important part of a Mission Study: asking God this question, and listening for God’s answer.
 - Prayer: listening and speaking
 - Scripture reading – esp. Numbers 13 & 14
 - Discussion and discernment
2. **Prayer**
3. **Discussion**

III. Analyzing & Interpreting the Data

The analysis and interpretation stage is where the MST is asked to answer the question, “So what?”

IV. Making Recommendations

Having gathered the data, analyzed the information contained in the data and prayerfully interpreted the implications of that analysis, the MST is now equipped to make its recommendations for moving forward. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Be concise.** The previous sections in the Report will have space for details, background, analysis, etc. The Recommendations section, ideally, is just one page long, and certainly no more than two. This will be the “ready reference” for Session and the pastor moving forward.

- **Be specific: What and How.** The Session has entrusted you with the mission of thoughtfully reviewing your congregation’s current situation and prayerfully discerning God’s will for the congregation moving forward, in order that you might share *what* you learned and provide specific guidance on *how* to do proceed.
 - ***Begin each recommendation with the responsible party and a verb.***
Starting each recommendation with the responsible party will prevent you from slipping into the “passive voice.” This is a frustratingly common practice that hobbles many organizations, because it jettisons all responsibility for action. You can usually recognize the passive voice by the use of the verb “be” – for example, “We recommend...”
 - ... that a Thursday night worship service *be started*...
 - ... that children *be given* children’s Bibles...
 - ... that neighbors *be invited* to church events...

While the sentiments here may be good, no one has been assigned the task of making them happen.

- Who will start the new worship service – the pastor? The worship leader? The Worship committee?
- Who will purchase the children’s Bibles? With what money? And who will give them out?
- Who will invite the neighbors? Will invitations be mailed or delivered in person?

The lack of specificity and responsible parties creates ambiguity and invites confusion. Clearer and more helpful recommendations would read,

- ... that the pastor work with the Worship Committee to develop a schedule and a liturgy for a 7pm Thursday worship service...
- ... that the Christian Education committee purchase children’s Bibles at the beginning of each year for all elementary school children who have not received one in the past, and that the DCE present these Bibles to the children at the Mother’s Day worship service.
- ... that deacons, whether currently serving or not, gather in groups of two to four and walk the local neighborhood (bounded by Main Street, Maple Avenue, Oak Grove Rd. and Walnut Court) two weeks before each church event and distribute invitations created by the Church Administrator to each household...

Now, these are just recommendations. Session may choose to adopt them completely, or only in part, or not at all. What's important for the report is that you provide the Session with a solid starting point, which includes these essential elements.

- **Recommend a timeline.** It's not uncommon for initiatives and new projects – even those approached with excitement and energy – to fall apart because of the lack of a schedule. A timeline helps keep us accountable and provides others with a helpful reference. The second and third recommendations above already include some scheduling (Mother's Day; two weeks before a church event). You might add to the first recommendation, "The church should hold the first of these new worship services no later than August 15, 2023."
- **Ground your Recommendations in your Analysis and Interpretation.** This is an important aspect of the recommendations that MSTs sometimes neglect. A Report may be filled with data and analysis, and yet contain recommendations that have no relation whatsoever to that data. How can this happen? Simple – someone with influence, either on the MST or close to it, thinks it's "a good idea." Start a men's ministry. Open a clothes closet. Create a new staff position for IT. There are people in your congregation who, with only the best intentions, are convinced that their suggestion will help the church. But if your research does not support that recommendation, you have a responsibility to ensure it does not appear in the Report. Including it only compromises the integrity of the Report and undermines its usefulness in people's eyes. Instead, you might say to that person something like, "That's an interesting suggestion, John. The Report is limited to documenting the results of our research, but I would urge you to share that recommendation with the Fellowship Committee. They're always open to new ideas."
- **Highlight two or three as priorities.** Depending on your research and prayer, you may have numerous recommendations. This is fine. As mentioned above, this will be a key reference document for the Session and the pastor for years to come. However, to avoid spreading church resources too thinly at the beginning, highlight **no more than three** recommendations to be pursued immediately. The Session and congregation can focus on these, and then move on to other recommendations once the high-priority items are well-begun.

V. Writing the Report

The Mission Study Report is a synthesis of the MST's work. For purposes of readability, it can be helpful to have one person write and "wordsmith" the final copy. This helps maintain a consistent tone and voice, which will make it easier for readers to focus on the content. The Report should include:

- A title page and a Table of Contents
- An Executive Summary (one to two pages) at the beginning of the report
- Summary conclusions at the end of each section. These conclusions are good places to put your Analysis of the Data
- Clear and concise presentation of information
- Enough color and graphics to provide helpful illustrations, but not so much as to overwhelm the report

Next Steps

Once the final draft of the Mission Study Report is complete, the MST meets with the Session to present the Report and answer questions. This discussion may prompt the MST to make a few minor changes to the Report, but at this point, the work of the MST is largely finished. Congratulations!

Session Review / edits

Since the MST is a committee of the Session, it falls to the Session to review and take action on the MST's Report. The MST will have spent significant time working on the Report, and the Session's new set of eyes can provide a helpful second look. In particular, the Session's review should include:

- What beliefs and assumptions does the Report confirm? Which ones does it challenge?
- What new data does the Report reveal?
- Does the Report address the three main questions of Identity, Neighbor and Purpose?
- Does the Report address existing topics of concern?

- Does the Report clearly link its recommendations to its data?

At the same time, Session should not receive this as a “rough draft” for them to revise. Grammatical and typographical corrections are welcome, but so long as the MST members have their names on the report, it is their work, not the Session’s.

Session members should read the Report individually on their own, contacting an MST representative with questions, before gathering to discuss the Report. Depending on the size of the Report, you may want to budget up to two hours for discussion. During this review Session should clarify the meanings of any unclear item in the Report, and answer the bulleted questions (above). Secondly, the Session should consider how it will respond to the Report.

Of course, the congregational will want to see the Report, and the MST will want to share the fruit of their labors with them. One way to accomplish this is to schedule a Town Hall meeting with the congregation, where the MST can review the report in detail and answer questions about the Report. There will also be questions about the recommendations. Ideally, the data cited in the recommendations will answer (even forestall) the question, “Why did you recommend this?” If not, the MST can answer. But the next question – “So (when) are we going to do this?” – is one the Session should be prepared to respond to, if not answer outright. Session may be at the point where it has chosen to accept all the recommendations, and to pursue the high-priority ones immediately. However, it may not have made a decision yet on some of the recommendations, or perhaps it may want to amend some – change the timeline or the responsible party, e.g. Whatever the case, everyone on Session should be clear by the time of the Town Hall meeting as to how Session will respond to each of the recommendations, even when a response might be “we’re planning to discuss it further.”

Publication

NOTE: if presbytery requested the Mission Study pursuant to allowing the congregation to elect a PNC, see “COM Review” (below) before proceeding with this section.

Once submitted by the MST, the Report is the property of the Session, and Session may use or disseminate it as it chooses. You may not want to post the entire report online, or if you do, you might consider waiting a month or two.

That said, experience has shown that something as significant as this has the potential to cause at least a little disruption, particularly among church members who have not been terribly engaged in recent months, and/or who did not attend the Town Hall meeting. The Report is a broad-ranging document, and its data provides context that could be key in understanding the reasons behind some of the recommendations. Lacking this context,

some members might be alarmed at something they read. Accordingly, Session might want to:

- Wait a month or two before posting the entire report online, if it .
- Provide members with paper copies of the Executive Summary and the Recommendations at the Town Hall Meeting. If Session has already made some decisions concerning their response, include a page with this information.
- Explain to people that printing costs money and uses paper

COM Review (conditional)

If your congregation has conducted the Mission Study as a step of the process to call a new pastor, the COM may ask to review the Report before giving the congregation permission to elect a PNC. If the Session has published a response, then it should provide COM with a copy of that response, as well. As for timing, check with the presbytery or COM at the beginning of the Mission Study to learn COM's meeting schedule. It's never pleasant to submit something to a committee for approval, only to learn afterwards that they met the previous, and won't meet again for another month (or two - !) Plan to submit your report a week to ten days before COM meets (find out their deadline for agenda items).

Used by PNC to write MIF

Lastly, if you will be electing a PNC, that committee will rely heavily on this document in assembling the church's Ministry Information Form (MIF).

Appendix A

Ministries Analysis

While long-term planning is critical to the health of any organization, too often it receives little attention from sessions and congregations. This neglect has been exacerbated in recent years as churches find themselves increasingly challenged to do more with less. When these immediate challenges demand our attention now, the less-urgent matter of long-term planning gets pushed to the back burner.

The Mission Study in general, and the Ministries Analysis in particular, provides a helpful framework for engaging in that long-term planning. The analyses recommended below have been found to be useful in helping the MST and the congregation to pull back from a narrow focus on the immediate and to see a broader picture. They accomplish this not only by documenting trends, but also by exploring current policies and practices with new eyes and determining whether they remain clear and relevant today, and whether they provide sufficient guidance for future planning and contingencies.

Whenever possible, the MST should gather data from the past five to ten years. The more data you have, the likelier you will be able to discern trends. Some of the items below may not apply to your church. You may decide that they aren't relevant – but you may also determine that they are relevant, in which case you would note in your Recommendations that the congregation pay attention to this area.

Yes, this is a lot of data. But as the MST gathers and analyzes it, they will gain a much fuller and more nuanced understanding of the church than any individual. That understanding will provide a solid foundation for the recommendations it will make in its report.

Charts and Graphs – Charts and graphs are often clearer and more powerful means of conveying information, particularly when measuring trends. Excel has some robust graphing capabilities, and the MST should make use of this resource. Note also that if a chart or graph shows a significant anomaly one year, it can be helpful to offer an explanation alongside – e.g., if revenue doubled one year because of a gift, you might write, “Gift received from the estate of John Calvin.”

Administration

- How this ministry has contributed to the mission of the church
- Staffing ratios over time (staff members: worshippers)
- Size of Staff, Session, Diaconate
- Other information specific to your church's administration ministry

Congregational History & Trends (see footnote)

- Reported membership
- Reported worship attendance¹
- Reported involvement in church ministries outside worship
- Demographics (age, gender, race)
- Moments / events where the congregation recognized the activity of the Holy Spirit
- Accomplishments and milestones that were (or should have been) celebrated
- Significant trauma and losses
- Conflicts and crises in the church
- How the church (particularly leadership) responded
 - Whether that response was sufficient and/or faithful, and/or whether “skeletons” remain unaddressed
 - How those historical events have impacted the church’s sense of identity and calling
- Pastors and Pastoral Transitions, including how they affected the congregation
- Relationship with presbytery, including
 - Participation in presbytery committees and ministries
 - Financial support (both ways)
- Relationship with PCUSA, including
 - Participation in denominational committees and ministries
 - Congregation’s responses to “hot-button” denominational issues

Christian Education / Discipleship

- How this ministry has contributed to the mission of the church
- Notable events in the lives and faith of church members
- Confirmation Class enrollment (total and as a percentage of attenders/members)

¹ Much of this data can be pulled straight from the Clerk of Session’s Annual Report to the denomination. If these are unavailable for reason, much of the information can be accessed online at <https://church-trends.pcusa.org/church/search/>. Obviously the pandemic throws a monkey wrench into both the relevance and the reliability of many of these numbers. We recommend you go back to Jan 1, 2016 to get several years of pandemic-free data. Data from the beginning of 2022 may also be helpful. Data from 2020 and 2021 may be helpful, or may not – it’s the MST’s prerogative to determine what it shall include. The report should include a brief explanation of how you treated data from this period and the reasoning behind your decision.

- Sunday School enrollment
- VBS enrollment
- Curricula across age groups
 - What curricula has Session approved and what classes have been taught?
 - Have certain areas been emphasized or neglected?
 - Looking at elementary, youth, and adult education: Does it appear that the church tries to provide a “general” education, or is instruction and subject matter organized within a framework that specifically plans for growth? If the later, how is that plan presented, and how does the church measure its effectiveness?

Deacons

- Accomplishments, changes in size or responsibilities, challenges, and how their ministry has contributed to the mission of the church

Fellowship

- In some congregations this ministry is responsible for planning events (or even running the kitchen) and helping introduce new members to the congregation.
- If your church does not have deacons, this ministry may oversee congregational care.
- While all ministries were affected by the pandemic, this one seems to have recovered more slowly than others. Explore how your ministries under this heading contribute to the church’s mission, how they were affected by the pandemic, and how they have recovered in the aftermath.

Finance (/ Stewardship)

- How this ministry has contributed to the mission of the church
- Budgets and Spending
 - Document overall budgets, revenue and spending for at least the past five years, ten if available.
 - On the revenue side, break out pledges, gifts and any other significant sources. Show how much each category has contributed to overall revenue by percentage, and graph the trends over time.
 - On the expense side, break out personnel costs, property/maintenance, and benevolences. Show how much each category has contributed to overall revenue by percentage, and graph the trends over time.

- It may be helpful to break out technology costs and trends
- Stewardship
 - If not part of the Finance ministry, explain its role and authority, and how it contributes to the mission of the church
- Endowment
 - How the Endowment has contributed to the mission of the church
 - Document annual revenue and outlays, and show trends over time
 - Of particular importance is the function of the endowment. Regrettably, it is not uncommon in churches with an endowment to be less than transparent about *how* endowment funds may or should be used.
 - Does your endowment have a policy manual? How frequently is it reviewed?
 - Is the endowment managed by the Finance committee, or a separate entity? If separate, how are they appointed or elected? Who is eligible to serve? What information do they provide to Session, and how frequently?
 - Does policy require the preservation of principal? Is the amount of principal to be adjusted for inflation, and if so, according to what formula?
 - Does it specify how monies shall be used? E.g., are funds only to be used for mission? Who determines which missions will be funded?
 - How about capital outlays, or major repairs?
 - Can the endowment supplement the church's operating budget? If so, what policies govern that use?
 - Are there any provisions for major contingencies, such as loss of buildings/property due to fire/flood? What happens if congregational giving decreases to the point where it will no longer sustain the church's ministries? Or even their legal obligations (mortgage, utilities, etc.)?
 - Does the committee that manages the endowment have sole authority to approve the expenditure of funds? Or, e.g., does a disbursement above a certain level (like \$10,000) also require session approval?

Mission / Outreach

- How this ministry has contributed to the mission of the church
- Notable changes, events, communities served
- Benevolences and Activities
 - If the church does not have an endowment dedicated to supporting mission, this committee might be the entity that decides which ministries the church supports and how much it will give. See the **Endowment** bullet (above) for questions concerning these activities.

Property

- How this ministry has contributed to the mission of the church
- Maintenance and repairs
 - Items of significance over the past ten years
 - Which items will require attention in the next ten years
 - Include estimated costs
 - Impending end-of-life dates for major equipment
- Capital improvements
 - Completed over the past ten years, at what cost
 - Evaluate whether these improvements have fulfilled their intended purpose, and have been worth the expense
 - Planned for the next ten years, and at what cost
- Building usage
 - By congregation
 - By community
 - As with the endowment, many congregations are unclear about the values surrounding the community's use of church buildings. Does the church see its buildings primarily as an opportunity generate revenue? Or does it see them primarily as a means of ministry to the community? There is no "right" answer. What's important is that these values and priorities be agreed upon by session and clearly communicated to the congregation. In coming years church building & property use by the community will become increasingly relevant options in the lives of congregations. It's critical that, **before** conversations begin on these matters, everyone understands what priorities are guiding the decisions. Revenue generation?

Community Mission? Witness? The church must have a “baseline” against which to measure its decisions concerning the stewardship of its assets. And it must then honor that baseline in practice.

Session

- Accomplishments, changes in size or responsibilities, challenges, and how their ministry has contributed to the mission of the church
- It is recommended that the MST thoroughly review the Book of Order guidance for the Session. (You might ask your Interim Pastor or POJ representative to assist in this). This guidance can be found in sections G-2.03, G-3.01 and G-3.02.
 - Evaluate Session’s activity in light of the Book of Order guidance.

Technology

- How this ministry has contributed to the mission of the church
 - The answer to this question will probably have changed rapidly over the past ten years.
- Infrastructure
- How current is software? Will it need updating soon?
- Info Security? IT support / review & update contracts
- WiFi – does it support current usage? Can it support future growth?
- Cloud usage, staff coordination, maintenance, security, updating
- How broadly is technology utilized? How familiar are leaders with how to use it?
- Church Website
 - Who maintains? Who has access? Is the design current?
 - Ask several outsiders from different generations to review the desktop site and the mobile site for user-friendliness
- Social Media Presence
 - Who maintains? Who has access? Is the church using current media streams?
 - Ask several outsiders from different generations to review the church’s presence on various media streams and give you feedback

Worship

- How this ministry has contributed to the mission of the church
- Notable changes – worship times, number of services, holiday/special day services

- Any *documented* conversations/discussions on the nature of worship (style, length, leadership, music) – try to avoid unsupported anecdotes
- Choir, bells, other?
- Leadership (lay, pastoral, musical, other)
- Live-streaming capability
- Quality of audio and video feeds and recordings
- Ushers

Appendix B

Research Resources

Denominational

<https://www.pcusa.org/news/2022/4/25/pcusa-2021-statistics-continue-show-declining-memb/>

https://pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/2021_stats_comparativesummary_update06_2022.pdf

Religion in America

Pew Research: <https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/religion/>

Church Trends

Barna Research Group: <https://www.barna.com>

Community Demographics

MissionInsite: <https://www.acstechnologies.com/missioninsite/mission-impact-guide/>

The Church in a Changing Culture

[Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory](#), by Ted Bolsinger (book)

Congregational Study/Survey

You want your mission study to involve as many members of the congregation as possible. There are two reasons for this: you want your mission study to truly reflect your whole congregation and you want your congregation to accept ownership of the study when it is done. If you do a mission study that does not involve the whole congregation, there is a strong likelihood that the congregation will resist implementing it or react with anger when the Session seeks to implement it.

It is possible for a MST to design its own congregational survey, distribute and collect it, and do its own tabulations and correlations. Be sure to read pp. 217-227 of *Studying Congregations* for excellent information both about creating surveys and distributing them.

Other

[Church Life Cycle](#) (PowerPoint)

Appendix C

Scripture Passages for Reflection and Discussion

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. 20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Ephesians 4:1-3

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:11-13

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

Philippians 2:5-11

5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

1 Thessalonians 5:15-22

15 See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise the words if prophets, 21 but test everything; hold fast to what is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil.

Appendix D

Congregational Participation

Who Participates?

- All members of the congregation willing to let God help them focus their concerns for the future of the church.

How do I become involved?

- By receiving this packet of information
- By agreeing to spend at least 15 minutes a day for the next two weeks reading Scripture, praying and reflecting on the future of our church

What am I expected to do?

- Read a brief scripture lesson (10 days)
- A different scripture each day
- Each scripture will present a “picture” for the church's life and mission.
- Pray for openness to God’s leading, such as: “Dear God, open my heart and mind so that I might hear your desires for our congregation.”
- Spend time prayerfully reflecting upon the scripture by asking three questions:
 - What does this tell me about God?
 - What does this tell me about God’s desire for our church?
 - What kind of pastoral leadership would be appropriate for our church, if we were to live into this image of the church?
- Write down the key ideas (2 or 3 descriptive words or phrases) that came during this time of prayer and reflection.
- Prepare a summary sheet at the end of the process.
- Come to the meeting designed for the gathering and discussing of key ideas.

What will happen to the key ideas that I have written down?

- They will be added to the key ideas from other members of the congregation. These ideas will be collected by the Mission Study Team and used in writing its report. Once the report is approved by the Session and the presbytery, the PNC will use it as the basis for writing the church’s Ministry Discernment Profile (MDP), which is the resume we publish to interested candidates.

Appendix E

Listening and Visiting: Suggested Session Guidelines

SESSION I (2 – 2½ hours)

30-35 minutes Introduction

Open with prayer (and a song if you like)

Introduce yourselves with names and your reason for joining or attending this church (allow one minute each, so if you have more than twenty people at your gathering break into smaller groups). Make a record of these stories.

Present:

- The purpose of this Mission Study — why you are doing it
- The process of this Mission Study — what will happen when
- Guidelines for our work together— openness, willingness to listen, etc.
- The process of Session I— what will happen in this meeting

15 minutes Become acquainted on a different level

For each of the following questions, invite participants to stand along the wall according to where they ‘stand’ personally with regard to the question. Participants will make a continuum from one extreme to the other using the criteria in parentheses after each question.

- How long have you belonged to, or participated in, this church?
(*since earlier this year —my entire life*)
- How long have you been a Presbyterian?
(*never — since earlier this year — entire life*)
- How many of your family members have ever belonged to, or participated actively in this church?
(*only myself — many relatives*)
- Do you consider yourself a thinking person or a feeling person?
(*thinker — feeler*)
- Do you consider yourself an introverted person or an extroverted person?
(*introvert — extrovert*)

- When you think about the ministry of the church do your initial thoughts tend to be more about individuals and their needs or about the needs of the larger body?

(individuals — larger body)

As you wrap up the exercise, acknowledge that we approach life differently and that is both a blessing and a challenge.

Discuss how this truth may affect your working together as a congregation.

30 minutes Explore our faith

Prepare Exploring Our Faith handouts from pages 41-43 in this guide.

Distribute handouts and complete as individuals for five minutes. Divide the larger group into threes and discuss for twenty minutes.

Re-gather as a group and spend 5 minutes discussing learnings.

25-35 minutes Recollections

Divide the larger group into groups of 15 or fewer people.

Have people sitting in a circle so they can see one another as they speak. Tell the group that each person will have about one minute to share their recollections. You may want to use timers to help the stories move along.

Remind the participants that remembering is an important part of the Judeo-Christian tradition. You may want to read Deut. 6:10-12 with its warning to take heed “lest you forget”.

Have a recorder taking notes in each group.

Ask each participant to share:

- Recollections of the most significant event in the life of the congregation since you have been a member. Details?
- List special or traditional things your congregation does every year.

When all have shared their recollections, ask the church historian or a person who searched the session records to report on ten important things that have happened in the life of the congregation.(you will need to ask someone to prepare this ahead of time).

10-15 minutes

Timeline

Post a paper timeline on a wall, beginning with the beginning of the church and continuing to the present day.

Have people go to the timeline and add the following information to it:

- Identify when you or family became members of the congregation.
- What are the earliest memories of the congregation?

Note important events in life of congregation — building changes, new programs, pastoral or staff changes, etc. Include significant events in the community, region, nation, world, and PC(USA) (mergers, factory closings, war, etc.)

Leave the timeline up and encourage the congregation to add to in the coming weeks.

10 minutes

Closing

Reflect on Session I — Share discoveries about ourselves and the church.

Introduce Session II — when, where, major focus

Close with a song and prayer.

EXPLORING OUR FAITH HANDOUT

1. “Faith” has held many different meanings for people. Which statement comes closest to your view of faith? (Circle only one response)

- a. A life of commitment of God, demonstrated by trying to do what is right.
- b. A decision to accept Christ, instead of continuing in one’s own sinful ways.
- c. A trust in God’s grace.
- d. A belief in all that the Bible says.
- e. As long as people are sincere in their beliefs, they show faith.
- f. The idea of faith does not seem meaningful to me.
- g. I am not sure, although I am convinced that faith is important.
- h. None of these applies; my view is _____

2. Which statement comes closest to your view of the way in which God influences what happens in the world? (Circle only one response)

- a. God sets history in motion but does not interfere with it anymore.
- b. God influences individuals who then shape events.
- c. God influences individuals but also shapes events directly through nations and social affairs.
- d. I do not think of God as “influencing” the things that happen.
- e. I am not sure, because I have not thought about it before.
- f. None of these applies; my view is _____

3. People often wonder how a merciful God allows terrible things to happen, such as the killing of six million Jews during World War II or the destruction of 9/11. Which response comes closest to your view of how God lets these things happen? (Circle only one response)

- a. God allows terrible things to happen in order to punish people for their sins.

- b. We do not know why these things happen, but God is able to use them for good.
- c. God does not have anything to do with these things; the devil causes them.
- d. People cause these things to happen, not God.
- e. I do not know how God can allow these things to happen; it does not seem right to me.
- f. I am not sure about this topic.
- g. None of these applies; my view is _____

4. Which statement comes closest to your view of life after death? (Circle only one response)

- a. There is no life after death.
- b. There must be something after death, but I have no idea what it may be like.
- c. There is life after death, but no punishment.
- d. There is life after death, with rewards for some people and punishment for others.
- e. The notion of reincarnation expresses my view of what happens to people after death.
- f. I am not sure whether or not there is life after death.
- g. None of these applies; my view is _____

5. Which statement comes closest to your view of the Bible? (Circle only one response)

- a. The Bible, though written by individuals, has been so controlled by the Holy Spirit that it is without error in all it teaches in matters of science and history as well as in matters of theology.
- b. The Bible, though written by individuals and reflecting their personalities, has been so controlled by the Holy Spirit that it is trustworthy in matters of theology and ethics, but not necessarily in matters of science and history.
- c. All of the Bible is both the inspired word of God and at the same time a thoroughly human document.
- d. Portions of the Bible, including some of its theological and ethical positions, may not be the inspired word of God.

- e. The Bible is merely a record of the moral and religious experiences of Hebrews and Christians.
- f. I am not sure that I can say.
- g. None of these applies; my view is _____

6. Which statement comes closest to your view of people in other countries who have never heard about Christ? (Circle only one response)

- a. I desire to share the love of Christ with them.
- b. If we do not preach Christ to them, then they will be damned forever.
- c. We should not worry about them, because so many people in this country have not heard about Christ.
- d. We should respect their religions and stop trying to impose Christianity upon them.
- e. I am not sure, because I have not considered it.
- f. None of these applies; my view is _____

7. Christians sometimes describe God as a “God of Justice” or a God who commands us to bring about justice. Which statement comes closest to your view of what this means. (Circle only one response)

- a. The Church should work for justice and should support groups that are working to end inequality and oppression.
- b. At a personal level, I should try to be just and fair in all of my dealings.
- c. This is a spiritual term that refers to God’s punishing evil, rather than to activities of the church or to individuals.
- d. The concept of god’s justice does not hold meaning for me.
- e. I am not sure to what it refers.
- f. None of these applies; my view is _____

SESSION II (2 – 2½ HOURS)

20-25 minutes Introduction

Open with prayer (and a song if you like)

Reintroduce yourselves with name and a hope for this Mission Study (be sure to record these)

Reflect upon Session I — things that stood out, learnings, discoveries, etc.

Discuss the process of Session II —what will happen today

10 minutes Focus on the timeline, noting changes from last time

Be prepared to comment on the changes over the years, past trends, etc., noting:

- What significant events happened in the immediate past decade, and
- What significant events happened in the decade prior to that one.

Continue to leave the timeline up during the mission study process.

5-10 minutes Distribute and discuss a handout listing

12 Assumptions that Guide Thoughts on the Church of Tomorrow by Bill Easum.

1. North America is the new mission field.
2. Society will become increasingly hostile toward Christianity in the twenty-first century.
3. The distinction between clergy and laity will disappear in the twenty-first century.
4. If churches only improve what they have been doing, they will die.
5. The best way to fail today is to improve yesterday's successes.
6. Bureaucracies and traditional practices are the major causes of the decline of most denominations in North America.
7. Traditional churches that thrive in the twenty-first century will initiate radical changes before the year 2001.
8. God exists and creates everything.

9. Jesus Christ is the center of all human life.
10. The Bible is our primary source of faith and practice.
11. The purpose of the Body of Christ is to bring the world to faith in Jesus Christ.
12. A way will be found to avoid world ecological and economic disaster.

15-20 minutes Bible/Theological Study

Prepare handouts or newsprint with the following questions:

- What does being the salt of the earth look like for you as a church?
- What are some of the ways your church has been the light of the world?
- How does the outside world see your good works?

Read Matthew 5: 13-16

Divide into groups of 3-4 and consider the questions.

Re-convene as a larger group and invite people to share a few comments in the whole group about what they discovered. Ask them NOT to report for their small group, but to respond to the question, "What was an insight you had about the Bible Study as you talked with each other?"

60-75 minutes Present the Demographic Study

Someone will need to have studied the demographic information and be prepared to present the data and an analysis of it.

Use of overhead projector and maps is great. Some of the information may need to be duplicated and handed out.

Take questions as they come up to make sure that this material is understood.

10 minutes Closing

Reflect upon Session II — major learnings

Introduce Session III — when, where, major focus

Close with a song and prayer.

SESSION III (2 – 2½ HOURS)

20 minutes Welcome

Open with prayer (and a song if you like)

Reintroduce yourselves with name & concern for the church you feel (be sure to record these)

Reflect upon Sessions I & II — major learnings

Discuss Session III — what will happen today

15-20 minutes Reports on Community Study

Each person who contacted a community leader needs to state who was interviewed and why, and then share briefly what their response was to the questions.

There should be a written report of these interviews already filed with the MST.

Only take questions for clarification.

5 minutes Financial Health of the Church

The Session should make a brief report on the current financial health of the Church.

30-40 minutes Congregational Survey

Present results of tabulation using overhead projector and analysis of major learnings from the Survey.

5-8 minutes Strengths of the Church

Brainstorm: compile a list of strengths of this church

Now combine the ideas lifted up into groupings of similar issues.

Save compiled list for use in Session V.

20 minutes Study Scripture

Prepare a handout with these questions on it:

1. What does Paul's description say to you about the Church?
2. What three factors from Paul's description ought to apply to all churches?
3. How does Paul's description fit this particular church?

Distribute pencils, Bibles, and the handout for the Bible Study.

Divide into groups of four or five and in each group:

Have a volunteer read aloud I Corinthians 12:4-13

Write individual responses to the questions for five minutes

Discuss the questions in the small groups for 10 minutes

5-8 minutes Reconvene and share significant insights from the Scripture study

15-20 minutes Identify Needs of Church and Community

Distribute newsprint and markers to the groups.

Explain that brainstorming means that all ideas that are lifted up are accepted without debate and listed on sheets of newsprint.

Brainstorm 1: compile a list of needs of church

- Combine the ideas lifted up into groupings of similar issues

Brainstorm 2: compile a list of needs of community

- Combine the ideas lifted up into groupings of similar issues

Save the combined brainstorming lists for Session V

10 minutes Closing

Reflect upon Session III — major learnings

Introduce Session IV — when, where, major focus

Close with a song and a prayer.

SESSION IV (2 – 2½ HOURS)

20 minutes Welcome

Open with prayer (and a song if you like)

Reintroduce yourselves with name & a thought or feeling that has arisen about the church since this study began.(record these)

Invite the group to reflect upon Sessions I & II & III — share major learnings

Discuss Session IV — what will happen today

5-10 minutes Timeline and Community Study

Comment briefly on any significant changes in the timeline

Invite any reports on interviews which have not been made yet

15-20 minutes Study Scripture

Prepare a handout with the following questions:

1. What do Paul's words say to you about setting goals for the future?
2. What does Scripture say to you about planning?
3. What does the life of Jesus say to you about planning?
4. What does the early Church say to you about planning?

Distribute pencils, Bibles and handouts.

Divide the larger group into groups of four or five and in each group.

In each group:

- Have a volunteer read aloud Philippians 3:12-14.
- Write individual responses to the questions.
- Discuss the questions and answers as a small group

5 minutes Reconvene and share significant insights from the Scripture study

10 minutes What is a Vision Statement?

Spend some time explaining what a vision statement is using these characteristics of a good vision statement:

- The vision is faithful to the congregation's best understanding of its religious heritage.
- The vision statement is oriented to the future.
- The vision is appropriate to this congregation.
- The vision statement is realistic in terms of the congregation's context.
- The vision statement contains both judgment and promise, good news and bad news.
- The vision is, in so far as is possible, a shared image of the desired future.
- The vision statement is specific enough to provide direction for the congregation's life, but broad enough to encompass multiple but complementary visions important to groups within the congregation.

Consider sharing some vision statements from the book *Congregational Mission Studies* as examples.

Make clear that a vision statement is not goals nor objectives; rather, goals and objectives will be built upon the vision statement.

20 minutes Visioning

Re-divide the larger group into small groups, ensuring individuals are with all new group members and no family members in the same group.

Distribute newsprint and markers to the groups.

Each small group should write two sentences describing a vision for the future of this church.

These sentences should seek to address the questions:

1. What kind of community of faith are we called to be?
2. What kinds of activities are we called to do as a people of God?

(questions taken from *Congregational Mission Studies*, page 18.05)

15-30 minutes Share Vision Statements

Post each group's work and have each group read its sentences aloud.

Discuss similarities and differences in the sentences.

Work toward consensus on some major points, perhaps by choosing important words and phrases to recommend to the MST for their on-going work.

10 minutes Closing

Reflect upon Session IV — share major learnings

Introduce Session V — when, where, major focus

Close with a song and prayer.

SESSION V (2 – 2½ HOURS)

20-25 minutes Welcome

Open with prayer (and a song if you like)

Reintroduce yourselves with name & joy about this church for which you are thankful. (record these)

Have the group reflect upon Sessions I & II & III & IV — share major learnings

Discuss Session V — what will happen today

15-20 minutes Study Scripture

Prepare a handout with the following questions:

1. What do the words of Hebrews say to you about persevering?
2. What does Scripture say to you about the community of faith?
3. What does Hebrews say to you about the joy of life in faith?
4. What example does Christ set for us in living lives focused on God's goals?

Distribute pencils, Bibles and handouts.

Divide into groups of four or five.

In each group:

- Have a volunteer read aloud Hebrews 12:1-2
- Write individual responses to the questions

- Discuss the questions and responses.

5 minutes Reconvene and share significant insights from the Scripture study

5 minutes Vision Statement

Recap of the vision statements developed at the last gathering

Report of the Mission Study Team on its rewrite of the Vision statement based on those statements.

Post the new vision statement for all to see.

5 minutes Introduction to Goal Setting

Have the newsprint from the brainstorming exercises in Session III

Quickly review the clusters of items on the list

Introduce the importance of goal setting by stating that the purpose of planning is to organize our ministry. Remind the folk that we plan because the reason behind our planning is important – namely the mission of the body of Christ. The best way to plan is to give ourselves some goals to achieve. The task for the next hour is to identify some possible goals for the church.

But for goals to be workable they must have three characteristics:

S – Specific: Peace on earth is too broad, safety in our neighborhood is specific

A – Attainable: Can it be done in the time allotted and with the resources available

M – Measurable: Will you know when you have attained your goal? How?

Goals begin with some kind of verb: for example, “to develop . . .”. When you write your goals, consider the following verbs: CHOOSE, DECIDE, RESOLVE, BUILD, EXPAND, SERVE, STUDY, INCREASE, DESIGN . . .

As you think about the church, imagine several kinds of goals; goals that MAINTAIN a solid, existing program; goals that DEVELOP a weaker, existing program; goals that ADD brand new programs, and goals the REMOVE ineffective programs. Sometimes adding a new program requires deleting an old one.

20-30 minutes Developing Goals

Divide into at least three small groups no larger than 10 each, with family groups divided among them

Have each group develop 3 goals, write them on newsprint, and bring them back to the larger group

15-20 minutes Sharing Goals

Have each group present their goals and post their newsprint

After all the groups have shared, invite a conversation by asking two questions:

- Where do you see some similarity among these goals?
- Where do you see some differences that will need to be reconciled?

Try to reach some consensus on three to six goals that seem most important

15-20 minutes Developing Objectives

Take the three to six goals and assign them to groups of 20 or less (there may need to be duplication in larger churches or smaller groups in smaller churches. If necessary two goals to be assigned to each group in order to have groups of 8 or more.)

Ask each group to develop two or more objectives for each goal. An objective is a way to begin to reach the goal. For instance, if your goal is to grow in membership by 10% each year for the next five years, your objectives would be things you could do to help you attain that goal. Again, you need to apply the SAM characteristics: S – Specific, A – Attainable, M – Measurable.

Again, have the groups list their objectives on newsprint and bring them back to the whole group.

10 minutes Report Objectives

Have each group report on the objectives it developed. Remind the gathering that these may well not be the only objectives needed to reach these goals but it is a way to begin thinking about what will be needed.

10 minutes Closing

Thank everyone for participating in the Congregational Gatherings

Share what the next steps in the mission study will be

Close with a song and prayer.

Appendix F

The Interim Season of Ministry

There are generally two contexts in which a congregation will undertake a Mission Study.

Ongoing Renewal

Just as regular check-ups are essential to monitoring and maintaining one's health, a healthy church makes a point of regularly assessing its own health.¹ The Mission Study is designed specifically for this purpose, i.e., to help guide a congregation through its own self-assessment. When performed regularly (e.g., every 5-6 years), it can readily build on previous studies. When the interval is longer, a Mission Study will require a more substantial investment of time, prayer, and effort.



Consider tool maintenance for the woodworker. They regularly sharpen, true, lubricate their tools and check them for square. They do this not only before beginning a new project, but regularly throughout the process. If they don't attend to this important aspect of their craft, their tools will soon become less effective (and more dangerous), their work will take longer and require more effort, and their project will run a greater risk of being damaged. A skilled woodworker willingly invests time and effort into these activities because they know that if they don't, their performance will invariably suffer.

As Part of an Interim Season

When a congregation's pastor departs, the Mission Study can be a critical ingredient during the subsequent Interim Season. Unfortunately, it is often short-changed by Sessions and congregations who are anxious to call "the next pastor." A fruitful, faithful, and profitable Mission Study during this critical time requires that the Session exercise leadership in specific areas.

Understanding and Expectations of the Interim

In past years, Interim pastors were expected simply to “maintain course” until the congregation called its next pastor. Over time, however, it became apparent that more was needed. People and neighborhoods change and grow (or decline) over time. When interim pastors simply maintained the status quo, the subsequent called pastor often encountered difficulty and struggled under the burden of leading change. Not infrequently, such pastors ended up leaving after only 2-3 years – a phenomenon that soon came to be known as the “unintentional interim.” Interim training today is different. Interim pastors now are trained to help a congregation re-assess itself – its identity, its location, and its calling – so that its MIF faithfully reflects God’s call upon the church today, and not the congregation’s nostalgic ideals of the past.

One of the most important factors affecting an interim period is *managing expectations*. Many congregations today treat the Interim season (and pastor) as a hoop to jump through before they can call a “real” pastor. The unfortunate consequences of this approach include:

- By devaluing the process, they place themselves in a position where they are disinclined to learn or to grow
- They make the next pastor’s task both more difficult and more risky by not fully engaging the interim process
- They are less motivated to give time and energy to the Mission Study. Consequently, it becomes more of a burden than an opportunity for learning, it is less valuable to the PNC in writing the church’s MIF, and it is less likely to be useful to the next pastor.

On the other hand, a congregation beginning an Interim Season is much better positioned when it understands that:

- The Interim Season is a season for the church to deliberately reflect, pray, and discern afresh, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, its identity and God’s mission for today and the future. It serves no one to rush this season.
- The Interim pastor is indeed a “real” pastor. In fact, the interim has all the qualifications of a pastor, **plus** the training to do interim work. It behooves the congregation to take full advantage of this resource.
- A thorough and well-executed Mission Study will serve not only the congregation, but also the next pastor. A well-written report can be an invaluable resource for

understanding the congregation's past, and a solid foundation for moving forward with faith and understanding.

Finally, faithful engagement in the interim season does not hinder the ministry of the church in any way. People sometimes feel that the Interim Season somehow delays or pauses the forward progress of the church. Such an attitude sees the Interim Season as an add-on, or an appendage. The truth is that, for most churches, the Interim Season is as integral to good church health as physical therapy is to patients recovering from surgery. In both instances, one's circumstances have changed significantly. We all know that the more faithful we are in doing PT, the better equipped we will be to live in our new situation. At the same time, we know that if we try to shortcut our therapy, our bodies will pay a price (see also the box on the previous page on tool maintenance for the woodworker.)

The Mission Study is a structured and thorough means of engaging the Interim Season faithfully. It is not sufficient in itself; during this season the Session should also engage the congregation in directed prayer, reading, and/or discussions, which the Interim pastor is trained to help you with. The Interim pastor will also address dynamics specific to your church, e.g., a division, a tragedy, the "end of an era," etc.

The Session's role and responsibility during this Interim Season cannot be overstressed. In many respects, the Interim Pastor is an outsider. They likely do not know the departing pastor, nor have they experienced the congregation's recent history. They will bring unfamiliar suggestions and changes, and our natural instinct (particularly as Presbyterians) is to resist change. In order for the Interim Season to be fruitful and well-received, and to ensure maximum congregational participation in the Mission Study, the Session needs to visibly, positively, and frequently remind the congregation why this season and the Mission Study are important, and how they will help bring the congregation fully into the present. While their voices and input are important, the ultimate task is not to pursue what the congregation wants, but to discern and follow God's will.

Appendix G

Charts and Graphs

Charts and graphs are a unique and often powerful way of presenting information to people. *So much data* is available to us today that we could easily spend the rest of our lives publishing different charts and graphs about our congregation and our community. The challenge to each MST is two-fold: first, determining which data is important; and second, determining which important data is more effectively communicated via graphics than via the printed word. There are some metrics that MSTs commonly graph over a period of time. These include:

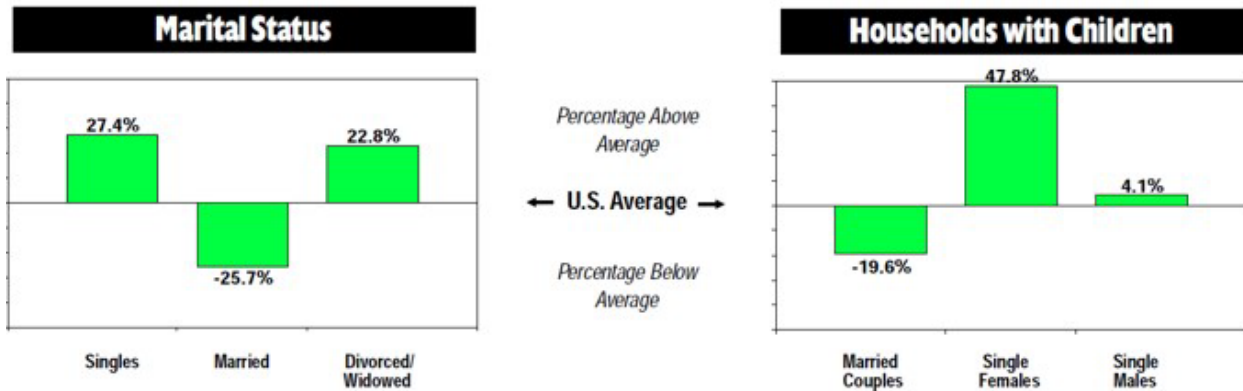
- Membership
- Revenue & expenses
- Worship Attendance
- Christian Education engagement
- Average age of members, or percentage of members within a certain range (e.g., 25-40)

Other metrics can include baptisms, deaths, weddings, new members. However – particularly if these numbers are fairly small or unchanging – then perhaps this is a good example of data that is not important, or not important enough to put in a chart.

There are other metrics, however, that – when illustrated with a chart or graph – can reveal information that is critical both to the church’s current health, and to its future planning. Below are some examples to consider. *Note: apart from the first example, which was taken from a commercial demographic report commissioned by a congregation, all of these charts were created by MSTs with Excel.*

Households

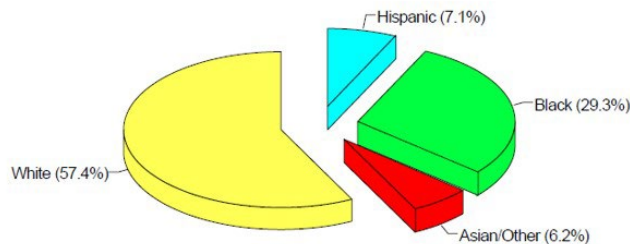
Some simple community demographics can tell you a lot about the surrounding neighborhood. These two bar graphs depict Marital Status and Households with Children for a given area, measured against the US average. You may want to compare that data with the data for your county, or even your congregation.



Racial/Ethnic Demographics

Pie charts are particularly helpful when displaying the percentage composition in a population.

Population By Race/Ethnicity-2016

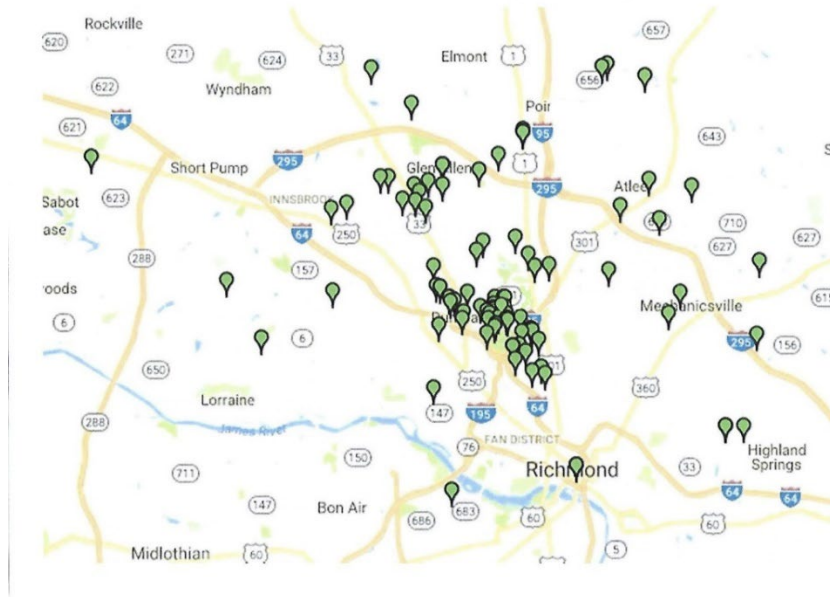


This is a snapshot of one year, for one neighborhood. You might also run this analysis on your congregation, on the US, and on the PCUSA for that same year, and then compare the four. You might then go a step further and get the same data on all four populations from twenty years earlier, and see how the groupings have changed.

Geography

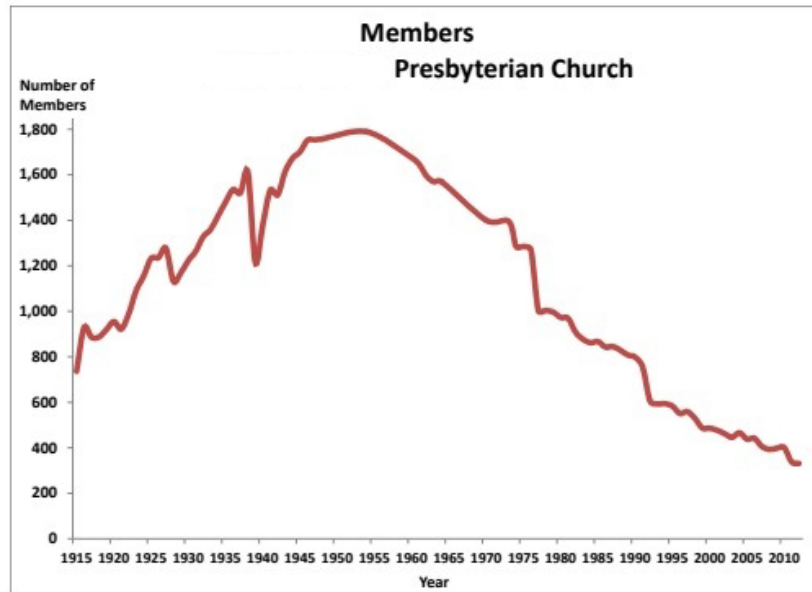
A map of members' homes is a good reference when the church considers new Outreach and Mission ministries. It's also a particularly helpful gift for a new pastor upon their arrival. If they're not familiar with the area, this will quickly prove to be of tremendous value when they plan pastoral and hospital visits.

Member Regional Geoplot

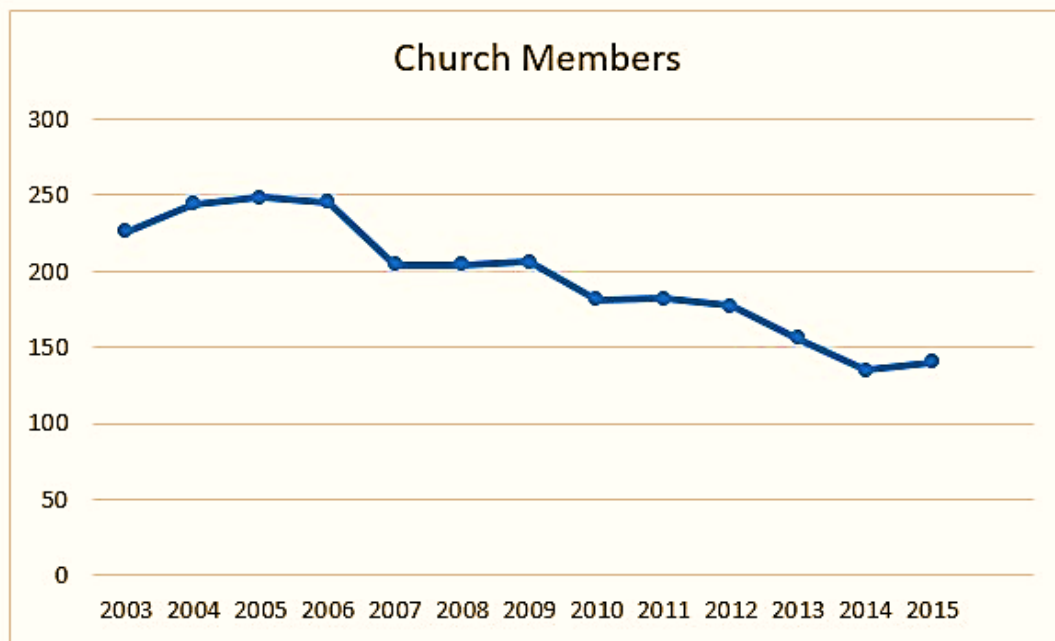


Membership

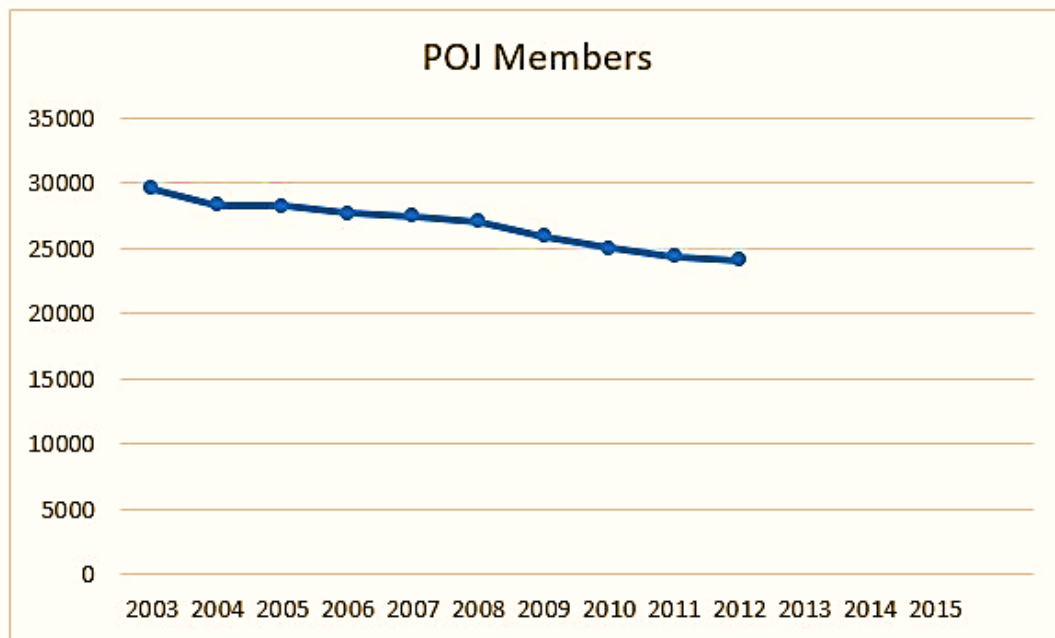
This church was able to access membership records going all the way back to 1915, so the MST decided to incorporate it all. Particularly if you have many older members, they might appreciate seeing data from their younger years.



Sometimes it can be helpful to compare data with a related group. The next pair of charts from a Mission Study Report of a POJ congregation compares membership trends of the church and of the presbytery.

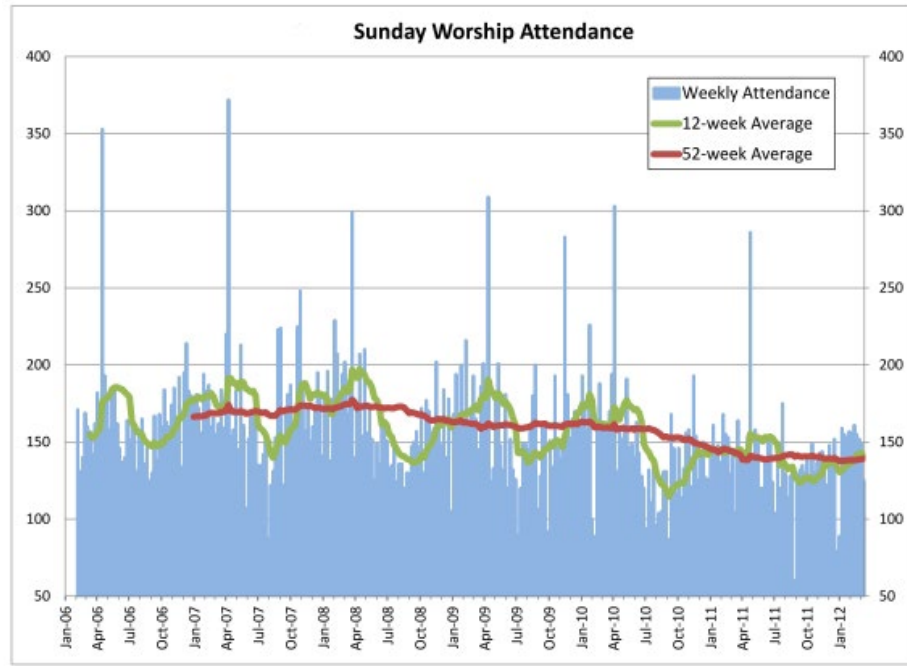


The above represents a decline of approximately 38% since 2003. This is greater than the average decline in membership of the Presbytery of the James (POJ) of approximately 22%, which is depicted below.



Attendance

This illustration uses a bar graph to display the data, and then superimposes a line graph to show the running average. This function is available in Excel.



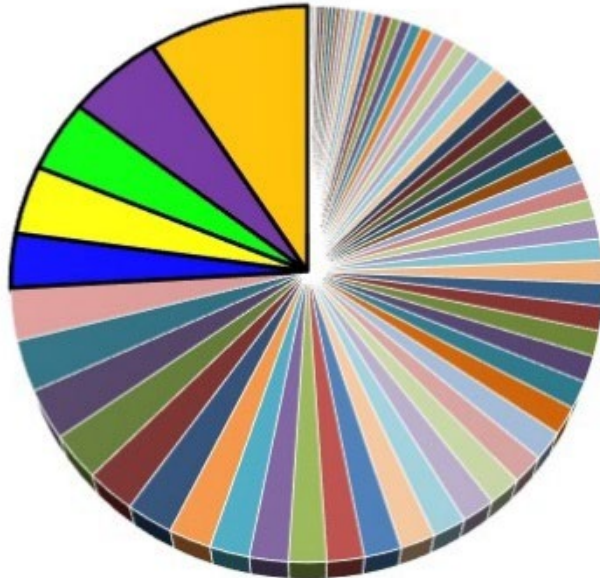
Giving

This last example is one that revealed information that – well, perhaps it was not technically “unknown,” but it certainly had not been *seen*. It took the giving data from all members from each of the previous five years. It did not require divulging any names – just five long lists of numbers (total given by each giving unit), each of which was sorted from smallest to largest and then displayed in a pie chart.

It is not uncommon – particularly in congregations where the membership of the counting team has rotated – for people to have a general idea of who the biggest givers are. What most people don’t know (and, more importantly, what most Sessions and Finance Committees don’t know) is *how much* of their annual budget depends on these larger givers. This is important for future planning, particularly if (for example) your top three givers are all over 85 years of age. These charts show what this church discovered. *Each wedge represents the total amount given that year by a “giving unit.”*

Income Distribution: 2015

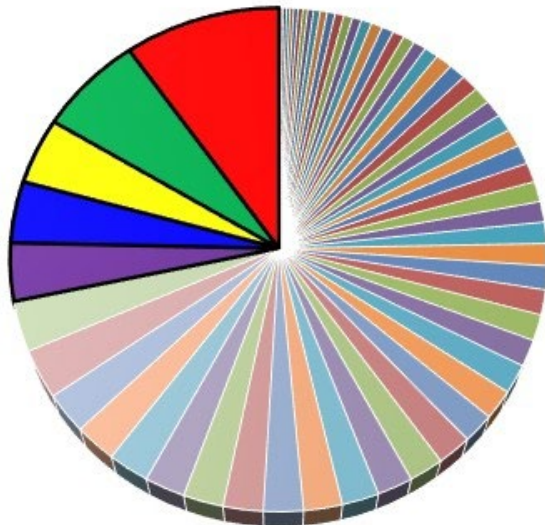
71 Donors



**5 Donors (7%)
provided 26% of
Income**

Income Distribution: 2016

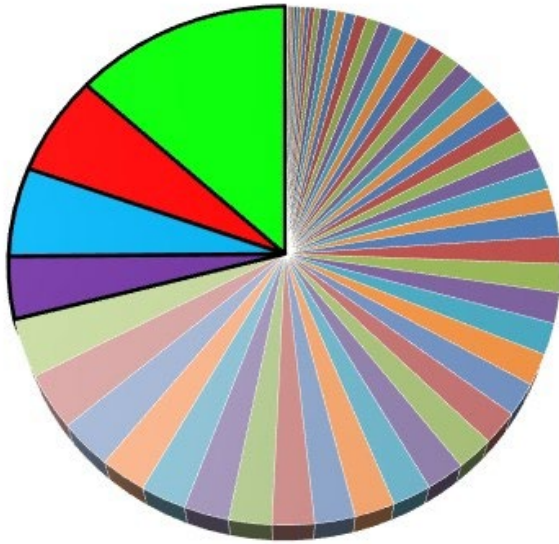
62 Donors



**5 Donors (8%)
provided 28% of
Income**

Income Distribution: 2017

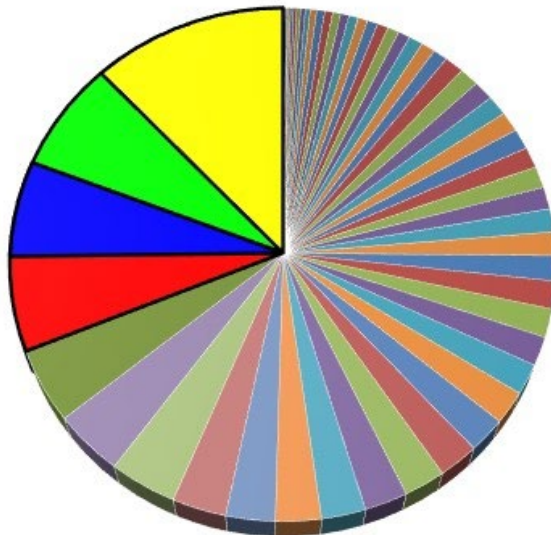
60 Donors



**4 Donors (7%)
provided 29% of
Income**

Income Distribution: 2018

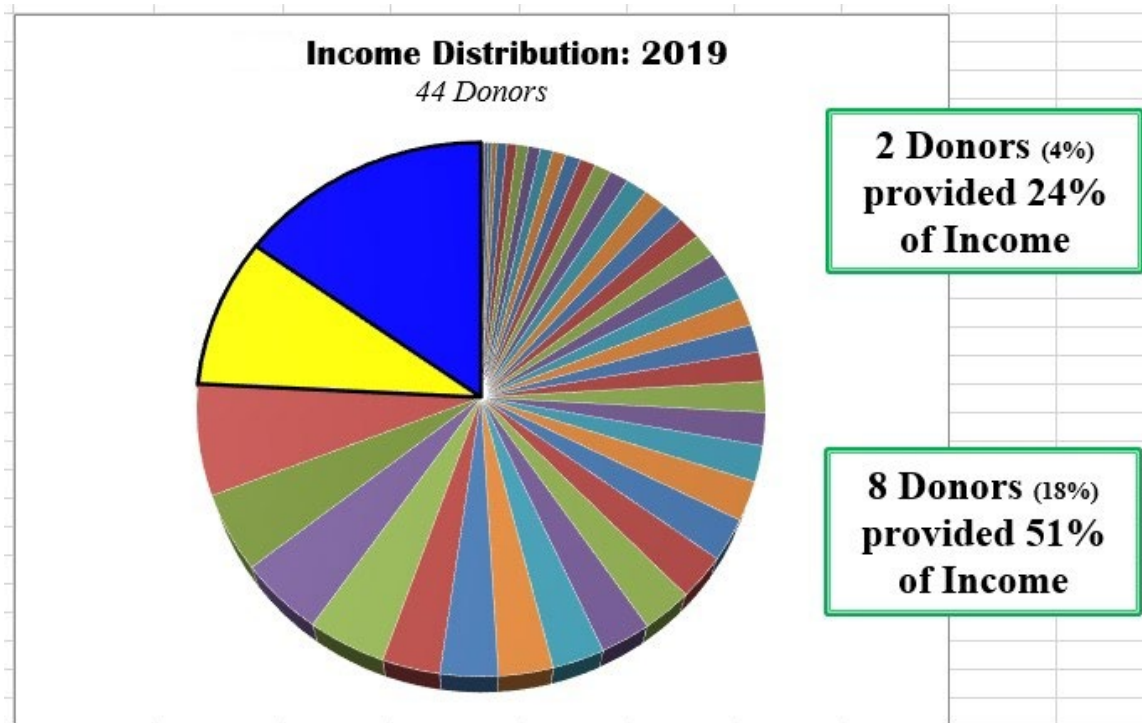
57 Donors



**4 Donors (7%)
provided 31% of
Income**

**3 Donors (7%)
provided 25% of
Income**

**10 Donors (18%)
provided 52% of
Income**



In all of these charts, every wedge represents one person's total giving for that year. As mentioned above, some people knew who the big givers were. A few people had a pretty good idea how much those givers had contributed. But until the MST ran this analysis, no one knew that the church had reached a point where *a quarter of its revenue came from two people*. And half of its revenue came from *eight* people! The chart for 2015 shows that even then, a quarter of the church's revenue came from just 7% of its members. That's not terribly healthy, although it's not unusual. But partly because the change was gradual, no one was aware of the church's precarious financial position at the time of the Mission Study. Clearly this situation had critical and practical ramifications when proposing terms of call for their next pastor.

It was also helpful to have a pie chart for each year, because it helped people to see how this situation had developed. Note that the percentages were affected by three different factors: 1) the number of donors, 2) the total amount received each year, and 3) the amount of individual members' donations.

This is a textbook example of how a chart revealed previously "unseen" data and made everyone sit up and take notice. Congregations have been similarly surprised by charts communicating the degree of their neighborhood's racial/ethnic diversity, the scattered geography of members, and other data. You are encouraged to make good and wise use of these tools.