

Finding Your Mission Focus

A World Mission Today webinar

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Goal: *To explore techniques for discerning your congregation's mission focus so that,*

- 1) your mission activities are supported,*
- 2) your mission activities resonate with your congregation, and*
- 3) your mission activities glorify God.*

1. First, it is important to set a foundation, measuring if your mission activities are FAITHFUL and EFFECTIVE. Use the "Partners" acrostic below to measure if your mission activities affirm these statements. If some do not, it may be important to explore the health of those mission efforts.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Success is Sustainable, measured by their ability to continue independently.

2. Next, it is helpful to *look inward* as a community, discerning how you as a congregation are called to engage in mission. Oftentimes, congregational mission efforts represent a hodge-podge of individual interests, rather than a communal sense of God's call. Because of this, mission committees often find themselves juggling 10, 15, even 20 mission projects, none of which are well-supported. Congregations that FOCUS their mission – that truly discern God's call on their community and narrow in on that – often find that their work is a) better supported, b) more meaningful to them and c) more communicable, meaning you have a better story to tell as a congregation.

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

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

- Where does your congregation already have connections, both near and far?
 - Where are members in your congregation from? Where are people in your community from? Does your church have historic connections to mission in a particular place? Are members of your congregation connected now to mission in a particular place? What local mission efforts does your congregation engage in? Do they concern a certain topic, focus, people group or part of the world?
- What does your congregation bring to mission involvement (gifts and needs)?
 - What makes your congregation unique? What skills do members of your congregation have to share? What is missing in the life of your congregation?
- What burdens are on the hearts of people in your congregation?

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- Is there a concern for a particular place in the world? Are members of your congregation interested in the needs of particular groups, such as vulnerable children, abused women, those who are hungry, or people living in fragile ecosystems? Does a particular focus spark interest in your congregation, such as poverty alleviation, evangelism, reconciliation, education, medical mission, water projects, or eco-justice?

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

- ☑ Where are there global communities who are yearning for a partnership? What might such a partnership look like? *Contact your denominational mission offices to learn more.*
- ☑ Where are other congregations in your community engaged in mission? *Contact your local ecumenical partners to learn of their involvement.*
- ☑ What needs do potential partners perceive in their community? *Contact your denomination mission offices, mission workers or global church connections to learn more.*
- ☑ How do the members of your congregation believe themselves to be called? *Contact your church leaders or denominational research offices to design a survey or listening process for your congregation.*
- ☑ How do the members of your community believe your congregation is called? *Contact your church leaders or denomination research offices to design a survey or listening process for your community partners.*

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

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

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

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

3. Now that you have considered *what* you feel called to do, consider *how* your community feels called to be engaged. Mission efforts can be lived out in several modes, each of which might resonate differently with individual's gifts and talents. Consider how your congregation might work best in the following modes of mission involvement.

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

4. In order to bring this all together, it is important to 1) set standards for FAITHFUL and EFFECTIVE mission involvement, 2) set out on an intentional journey of discernment and 3) get a sense for how best your congregation might engage in mission.

A helpful exercise can be to plot out your mission efforts. Look at a list of your mission activities as a congregation. See if there are any points of convergence. Do several of the activities involve children? Are a number connected to immigrant communities? Try to categorize the mission areas in which you are involved. Then, consider what modes of mission you do within those areas. In your education work, are you mostly involved in tutoring (hands-on)? Do you work to train teachers internationally (empowered partners)? Or is your mission work more in the area of advocacy, organizing efforts to contact senators and representatives concerning education policy? On the next sheet, plot out this mission work. Circle the efforts that have been the most life-giving for your congregation. Underline the efforts that have the most potential for growth.

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

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

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Mapping Your Mission Involvement

| | Hands-on | Empowered Partners | Advocacy |
|--|----------|--------------------|----------|
| <i>In each block, fill an area of mission (ie. education, homelessness, international partnership, etc.) in which your church is involved.</i> | | | |
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| <i>To what new areas of mission is your congregation sensing a call?</i> | | | |

Plot your mission involvement based on your mission work and mission mode. Circle the efforts that have been most life-giving for your community. Underline the efforts with the most potential for growth. Consider: *are there ways we might focus our efforts to gain greater clarity of mission? Are there new modes of mission we are feeling called to explore?*

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