

A Mission Assessment Guide
Presbytery of Riverside
revised 2023

Part 1: Reflecting on Scripture, Theology, and Congregational Identity

1. Once a Mission Assessment Team is appointed and oriented, spend some time together in prayerful reflection on some **Bible passages**.
Matthew 13:1-43; Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 9:33-50; Luke 6:17-49; Luke 12:35–38;
John 3:16-21; John 15:1-27; John 17:20-26; Romans 12; I Corinthians 12
What themes emerge that speak to our congregation at this time?
2. Together read the first four chapters of the **Book of Order**. (Don't worry, they are very short chapters.) How do these statements about the church relate to our congregation? What aspects help you understand what it means to be Presbyterian congregation?
3. You might find it beneficial to take a look at the **Book of Confessions**. Read: *The Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Confession of 1967, the New Brief Statement of Faith, the Barmen Declaration and the Belhar Confession*.
4. A written history of the church should be brought up to date. Then, based on your readings and your familiarity with the congregation, describe the identity, beliefs, and values that your congregation holds. What motivates people to be a part of this church? What words describe the character of your church? ("We are _____. We value _____.") Describe the range of theological diversity of your church. Which core beliefs and views are held in common, and which are diverse?
5. Based your familiarity with the congregation, what activities of your congregation seem to engage them in loving one another and serving God? Where do people invest energy, passion, and interest that brings people together, builds community and enables them to serve Christ? Which ministries help the congregation grow spiritually and help the church serve those in the neighborhood?

Part 2: Listening to the Congregation

1. Gathering and Engaging Members and Friends of the Congregation

Invite members and friends of the congregation to gather and share their thoughts about the life and mission of the church. Select from the following activities or create your own. Invite members and friends to gather (in groups of five to ten) for a 90-minute discussion (in person, on zoom). These conversations may be convened and led by a member of the MAT or by the VCI Coordinator or other leader. A Scribe should record the remarks. The MAT should review, analyze, and include the remarks in the mission report.

A. Telling Our Story

Participants share in a **discussion** about their past and recent experiences with their church. Thankfully recall meaningful events and highlights of their church.

1. These or similar questions may be asked:
 - a. “My church means so much to me because”
 - b. “One person who made me feel that this is my church home is _____ because they”
 - c. “Our church will be known in history as the church that”
2. All may be also invited to contribute art, photos, etc. and make them into a collage or place them on a timeline that helps tell the church’s story. These may be shared via the congregation’s media or on the walls of the church.

B. Celebrating Programs, Activities, Events of our Church

Everyone joins this **discussion forum** to **recall the activities** that the church has done in the past year (or so).

1. A Moderator calls on people to briefly name activities that they have participated in or are aware of. The Moderator may repeat or summarize what is said to be sure that all hear the remarks.
2. A Scribe makes sure that the remarks are written, preferably so that all can see them as they are called out. They may be put on “Screen Share” or on a newsprint pad on an easel. If written on newsprint, when a sheet is full, it may be attached to a wall and the group keeps going.
3. This activity can take about 15-25 minutes. Marvel at all you do as you go, allow memories to be voiced (briefly), while keeping up a rather brisk pace in order to include as many remembrances as possible. When sharing winds down, invite participants to share their overall perceptions, learnings, or inspirations from doing this activity.

C. Count your Blessings, count them one by one...

ABCD is Asset Based Community Development (or in our case ABChurchD). This is an opportunity to count a church’s blessings: the people, places, things we have. What has God entrusted to our care to nurture and use?

1. What are they? (people, places, things)
2. How are these assets being utilized? How often are they used? Are any neglected?
3. How can we “develop” and use these assets for greater benefit for all?
4. Who else might benefit from our church sharing our assets and blessings?

D. Theological and Biblical Perspectives

1. Invite participants to discuss **the essence of our church**
 - a. The purpose of our church is ...
 - b. God is calling us together to ...
 - c. We will follow Jesus by
 - d. We are known as the church that ...

2. Surveying the Congregation using Interview Questions. *(optional)*

Contact and personally interview a variety of persons who participate in the life of the church by phone or visual media (zoom, messenger). The MAT should review, analyze, and summarize the responses. Consider using these or similar questions:

1. How long have you been a member of _____ church?
2. Tell me about a time when you felt most engaged with your congregation. What experiences have been particularly meaningful to you? What were you doing? Who were you with?
3. How involved are you currently in the life of the church? What are the most spiritually enriching activities in which you are engaged? When and where do you see God working in the life of your congregation?
4. What are three hopes/dreams/prayers you have for your congregation and its next pastor?
5. What other reflections about our congregation would you like to share?

Part 3: Identifying the Character and Health of our Congregation

1. The MAT should review, analyze, and summarize the responses of each interview and each gathering and add them to the report. Describe the Identity of this unique congregation and its ministry. What makes us special? Who are we as God's Beloved?

2. Congregational Membership

Conduct a review of the current membership of the congregation over a 5 to 10-year period and record your findings. Use Church Membership rolls, Congregational databases, Church directory, and Session records. Describe trends in membership changes (+ or -) over the past 5 to 10-year period. This information will be used in determining potential communities and relevant goals and objectives.

Review the facts and write an analysis keeping in mind the following:

- a. Current total number of members _____
- b. Tenure by percentages _____ (under 5 years, 5 - 10 years, etc.)
- c. Number of inactive members (attends worship less than 4/year) _____
- d. Number of non-member "regular attenders" (friends) _____
- e. % of active members that are women _____
- f. % of active members that are men _____
- g. % of active members with disabilities _____
- h. Racial/cultural composition (by # and %) _____
- i. Age composition _____ (# under 25, between 26-50, 51-75, over 75)
- j. Residential location of members by distances to church.
- k. Group by percentages those living 0-5 mile distant; 6-10 miles, etc. _____

3. Financial Status

Conduct a review of the financial status of the congregation over the 5 to 10 or 15-year period to the present. (See: Session's annual report to Presbytery or Financial statements in the Annual Reports to the Congregation.) Write an analysis keeping in mind the following:

- a. Total resources and assets of the congregation.
- b. Annual sources of congregational income which includes membership pledges; special gifts by members and friends; building fund contributions; endowment income; investment income; facilities use fees and/or rental income.
- c. Calculate what percentage each source of income represents of the total annual income.
- d. Describe trends or changes (+ or -) during the past 5 to 10-year period or the tenure of the last pastor.
- e. Summarize the church's stewardship program or efforts of serving and giving.

Part 4: Looking at our Neighborhood.

Review the demographic information found in a *MissionInsite* report provided by the presbytery. As you think about your community consider the following questions and write responses for the report.

1. Who lives in our neighborhood? What are the various ages, interests, races, ethnicities, economic levels? Where do people work, shop, seek entertainment and grow spiritually? How does the composition of the neighborhood compare to that of the church?
2. What are the needs of the people in your neighborhood? Who is hurting? Who is forgotten? How might this church, following in the footsteps of Jesus, walk alongside these folks? How might the church reach out, befriend, and support those most in need?
3. What resources are in your neighborhood, such as non-profits, public institutions, community groups, ecumenical associations, mission partnerships, schools and businesses trying to make a difference? With whom does your church currently partner in serving the community? Where do you see opportunities for future collaboration and partnership?
4. What interests, skills and passion of this church might make the most impact in service to the neighborhood? What new relationships might be developed? What might excite and engage members and friends in a fresh outreach that meets the needs of others in the community?

Part 5: Assessing the Current Ministries of our Church

A. Make a list of all the ministries and programs in your congregation. List everything you do, every committee, ministry and mission outreach, small group, and fellowship activity. Chart the purpose of each, the leadership and how long this activity has been active.

B. You might choose to interview some of the leaders of these activities or use the responses of the congregation gathered in the Listening Session.

The following are some questions you might use:

1. How many people are served through each program?
2. What are the ages, racial/ethnic/cultural backgrounds of those involved?
3. What is the purpose of the ministry or mission?
4. How long has your church been engaged in this activity?
5. Who is involved in leadership? How are they chosen? How are they supported?
6. How do you assess the effectiveness of these programs?

C. Evaluate the effectiveness of each ministry and program.

1. Which are no longer “bearing fruit” (*But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance. Luke 8:15*)? |
2. Which seem to be producing spiritual growth within the congregation?

D. Include the MAT’s reflections and analysis as you write this section of the Mission Plan.

Part 6: Envisioning the Future Mission of the Church

A. Consider the Marks or Attributes of a typical Vital Congregation

A Healthy Church engages in

1. discipleship formation – deepening spiritual maturity via providing ongoing opportunities for all ages to learn and grow
2. intentionally, authentically sharing our faith, God’s activity in our lives (evangelism)
3. boldly and graciously loving & serving our communities and our world
4. empowering servant leadership - both renewing skills of current leaders as well as welcoming, engaging, developing new leaders
5. worship that is spirit-filled, creative, engaging, inspiring, and motivational
6. caring relationships among God’s Beloved: members, visitors, neighbors, the world
7. healthy partnerships within and amongst churches’ leaders and the community

B. Engage these Questions about the 7 Marks of Vital Congregations

1. How does our church help nurture you in your spiritual life and equip you for being a Disciple of Christ? What spiritual gifts does our church possess?

2. Recall a time when Christ or God became Good News for you? What prevents our church from sharing that with others?
3. How does this congregation care about its neighbors? Who is being overlooked, not noticed, forgotten? Who near our church needs to hear “good news?”
4. Name a “servant leader” and what they do. How can our church nurture and support servant leadership?
5. Share how our church’s worship inspires or energizes you? What is missing? How might our church love God more dearly and follow Jesus more nearly, and be led by the Spirit more clearly?
6. Share an experience of when you felt deeply cared for? How might our church encourage and support acts of caring and serving?
7. What partners may aid our church in serving the community (and thereby attract people to join us)? What might encourage others to participate with us in the mission of our church?

C. Write two brief statements or paragraphs, one that describes 1) the Vision of this church and one that announces 2) the Mission of this church.

- A **Vision Statement** provides a description of a target future state, in qualitative terms, that answers the questions,
 - “Who is God calling us to BE?” “Who do we hope to become?”
- A **Mission Statement** summarizes a plan for ministry,
 - “What will we DO to achieve our Vision?”

1. A Vision Statement

Brainstorm and list key ideas, concepts and words that have arisen in this assessment process so far. Then write a one- to two-sentence statement of your vision of what kind of people God is calling this congregation to become. This vision statement is for your congregation at this time in their life. It is meant to help focus your present journey and guide your session, congregation, and new pastor as you move forward.

Here are three examples of Vision Statements:

- a. “We are responding to God’s invitation to be loved, to be in Christ, to be of use.”
- b. “We are a diverse community centered on Jesus Christ, seeking to wholly enjoy Spirit’s grace, faithfully embody God’s love for one another. We boldly engage our culture with God’s truth, from our neighborhoods to the nations.”
- c. “We are an inclusive community seeking to follow the path of Christ who calls us to a life centered on love of God and neighbor. We gather to seek God in worship, experience God’s love in community, and hold one another and the world in prayer. Sent out by the Holy Spirit, we go into the world to be living offerings of God’s love, mercy, peace, and justice.”

B. A Mission Statement

Ideally, a Mission Statement is short and catchy. It should be concise, build morale, reduce frustration, allow concentration, bring focus, attract cooperation, invite partners, and assist evaluation. A Mission Statement will succinctly communicate to everyone in the congregation and in the world what this church is about. A Mission Statement generally consists of a brief proclamation of identity and an overview of the church's approach to ministry. It answers the questions,

- a. What is God calling us to do?
- b. How will we specifically "do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God?"
- c. To whom is Jesus leading us to care "for the least of these?"
- d. How can we "be the answer" to the prayers of people in our neighborhood?

Here are 3 examples of Mission Statements:

- a. "The Mission of ____ Presbyterian Church is
 - ~ to listen for God's word for us today.
 - ~ to model the radically inclusive welcome of God.
 - ~ to tend the Holy in ourselves, one another, and creation.
 - ~ to be the Christ in the world."

- b. "____ Presbyterian Church worships our Great God together. We practice and proclaim the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we share the good news with all people, making a positive difference in their lives."

- c. "The Mission of ____ Presbyterian Church is to create a radically inclusive, just, and loving community mobilized to alleviate suffering and break the cycles of poverty and marginalization. Our Core Values emerge as a spiritual movement. They are rooted in empowerment, recovery, and personal transformation.

Part 7: Preparing for Future Ministry with new Pastoral Leadership

A. Moving from Engaging the 7 Marks to Creating a Mission Action Plan (MAP)

1. What can you do to expand your "spiritual horizons," care more deeply, serve selflessly? (pray, journal, engage with a study group, meet a neighbor, etc.)
2. Consider what you are passionate about and share that with someone. Ask them to share with you their passion. Notice how God may be in this encounter.
3. Walk your church's neighborhood or your own. Be observant with all your senses. Set up a brightly painted picnic table on the church lawn. Choose one day a week to sit there for a couple hours (with coffee, tea, or a book). Engage people who pass by or stop to chat. Ask how their day is as if you really want to know. Invite them to sit down (offer them water). Be kind. And caring. Then later ask yourself

- “Where is God here? What am I learning about my neighborhood? Who needs attention? How can our church help?”
4. Who needs you? Enhance a skill, then choose an activity that allows you to be a “servant leader.” How is that activity helping others? Who might become involved due to your act of service?
 5. Skip worship at your church and attend another church. Notice what activities inspire you and feed your spirit and which do not. How might you enhance your own worship experience?
 6. Expand your horizons: participate in something you have overlooked: converse with (listen to) someone of a different generation, culture, race, gender, faith, economic level in an open, appreciative, caring way. Notice how that opens your mind, engages your heart, and maybe changes you.
 7. Consider what activities and ministries of your congregation are most vital. List the attributes of what they contribute to “building up the Body of Christ,” the neighborhood, and the world. How do they contribute to the overall health of our congregation and its mission?

B. Considering our Mission Priorities

Recalling previous discussions of the MAT and the conversations and interviews of members and friends, and the activities that you have recently chosen to enact,

1. Which topics garnered the most interest and energy? What raised passions?
2. What ideas and activities seem to draw in and engage the members and friends (and neighbors) of our church?
3. Which acts of love and service might get our neighbors to talk to their friends about how caring our church is?
4. What outreach actions might our church take that will get people in the neighborhood to look up, see and believe that God is concerned about them?
5. Make a list of Actions that God may be calling this church to do that meet the greatest needs of the neighborhood.

C. Choosing our Mission Priorities

1. Prioritize the list of outreach activities.
 - a. What are the top three “most-needed?”
 - b. Which three might give “the most bang for the buck” invested?
2. Select three to five Mission Priorities that our church can focus on during the next three years.
3. Rank them (first, second, third....)
4. Include them in the report.

D. Pastoral Leadership Attributes that will help us Achieve our Mission Priorities

1. Reflect on how previous pastors were involved in guiding and supporting the mission of the congregation over the last 25 years by discussing:

- a. How have we been influenced and changed by pastoral leadership?
 - b. What have we learned about ourselves and how have we grown?
 - c. What styles of leadership worked well? Give memorable examples.
 - d. What styles were more challenging for our congregation?
 - e. Were divisions healed? How?
 - f. How were compromise and unity achieved?
2. Describe the kind of pastoral leadership that we now need to further the mission priorities chosen for our congregation for the upcoming years.
 3. What are the traits of a pastor who will deepen our faith, our resolve, and our commitment to guide, support, and accomplish the mission of our church?
 4. Prioritize them. Add them to the report (MAP).
- E. Completing the Mission Action Plan (MAP)

The Mission Assessment ends when the Mission Assessment Team:

1. Writes, edits, and reviews the Draft of the Mission Action Plan (MAP)
2. Presents the Draft of the Mission Action Plan (MAP) to the Session
3. Then the Session will
 - a. Review, edit and adopt the Mission Action Plan (MAP)
 - b. Thank and dismiss the Mission Assessment Team
 - c. Present the Mission Action Plan (MAP) to the Presbytery for approval
 - d. Involve the congregation in understanding the Mission Action Plan
 - e. Begin to implement priorities of the Mission Action Plan (with the support of temporary pastoral leadership and the presbytery)
 - f. Appoint a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) who will work to find and present a pastoral candidate for election by the congregation (with approval of Riverside Presbytery).
 - g. Continue to guide, direct, nurture, and support the Mission of our Church