

*Presbytery
of the
Inland Northwest*

**Mission Study
Guidelines**



We're excited to hear your congregation is beginning the process of a mission study. We hope the process will be a spiritual practice to enable your congregation to listen to how the Holy Spirit is moving in your midst. It can be an exciting time of renewal and rebirth. The Commission on Ministry is here as a resource to you throughout this process. There are different points of reflection to consider in moving forward. For this reason, the Mission Study process may take some time and should not be seen as a means to an end, but as an important discernment tool for your congregation.

These guidelines have been developed to assist the Mission Study Team and the church through the Mission Study process. By definition, following a guideline is never mandatory. The Presbytery of the Inland Northwest is blessed to be comprised of a wide variety of congregations, and it would be impossible to write a definitive guide to Mission Studies that would address every need and concern. Please use these guidelines as a map for the process of celebrating who you are, as a congregation, who you have been, and discovering who you long to become. Tailor, replace, or add activities as you see fit. The goal is to encourage hope, vision, and possibility for your congregation's future.

If you are experiencing a pastoral leadership transition, your Commission on Ministry Liaison and Executive Presbyter will conduct an exit interview and an orientation of the Mission Study process with the Session. Please refer to the Presbytery website (Resources) for further information. (Click the following link for: [Transition Steps Guidelines](#).)

If you have any questions, please contact your Commission on Ministry Liaison. Your COM Liaison's name and contact info can be found here: [COM Liaison Information](#).

DEVELOPING A MISSION STUDY

I. Who Are We?

A. *A description of the community*

1. Demographic data for zip code and surrounding area
<https://factfinder.census.gov>
2. Information from local Chamber of Commerce or community web site
3. Information about schools, parks, museums, cultural events
4. Demographic study available from <http://www.perceptgroup.com> for a fee

B. *A description of the church (including who we have been)*

1. Five Year Statistical History from PC (USA) <https://church-trends.pcusa.org>
2. Strengths
3. Neighborhood involvement
4. Worship style(s)
5. Christian Education and Small Groups
6. Mission Support
7. Committees and their roles
8. Church Resources
 - a) Staff
 - b) Volunteers
 - c) Facilities
 - d) Financials
9. Core Values (see Appendix D)

C. *Congregational Recollections*

1. What are the major events in the history of this church that have affected the church today?
2. Was there a “High Point” or “Glory Days” time of the church? What did that look like, what aspects of that time still exist and what, if changes occurred, brought about those changes?
3. What have been the most difficult social and cultural issues facing the congregation over the past 5 years and what have been the effects on the congregation?
4. What do you love about your congregation?
5. Describe a time when you experienced God’s presence through the church.
6. If you are in a pastoral leadership transition, under what circumstances did the previous pastor leave, and what have been the effects on and reactions from the congregation?

II. Who Do We Long to Be?

A. *Committee Discernment*

1. Discernment is a critical part of the ministry plan process. Discernment is the “listening to God's call” that clarifies to what ministry God is calling this congregation.
2. Prayer
3. Scripture Study
4. Faith Sharing
5. Receiving “Who Are We” reports

B. *Congregation Discernment*

1. Prayer
2. Scripture Study
3. Faith Sharing/Reflections
4. Focus and Direction from Listening Interviews – Appendix A

C. *Community Discernment*

1. Neighbors’ Responses from Listening Interviews – Appendix B
2. Faith in Culture Responses from Listening Interviews – Appendix C.

D. Develop a Statement about who you long to be

1. How do you live out who you want to be?
2. How do you address the hopes of the community?
3. What wishes do you have to enhance the vitality of your congregation and community?

III. Write the Mission Study

- A. Outline the Process*
- B. Report the Process Results*
- C. Identify the Major Themes for the Future*
- D. Prepare an Executive Summary*

Appendix A - Listening Interviews

Focus and Direction

Action: Conduct a series of interviews within our congregation as a beginning place to uncover what new adventures God might have in store for our congregation.

Action plan:

1. Plan to conduct 20-30 interviews. Look for a cross section of people within the congregation: those who have been members for different lengths of time, a mix of genders and age groups.
2. Determine how we will identify people that might be willing to be interviewed:
 - a. What communication channels exist within our congregation that we could use to get the word out that we are looking for people to help us explore this challenge?
 - b. Are there groups within our congregation that it would be important to ensure are represented when determining whom we will interview?
 - c. How can our pastor help us with finding people in the congregation who would be willing to be interviewed?
3. Who in your congregation can help us conduct these interviews? Who are good listeners in our congregation?
 - a. How will we invite them to conduct interviews?
 - b. What does our invitation to them need to include?
 - i. Why are we doing this?
 - ii. Why are we asking you to help us?
 - iii. What is expected of you?
 1. Nature of action
 2. Timeline to complete it
 3. Tools provided
4. Use the worksheet below to take notes for each interview.
5. What is our timeline for completing this action?

Interview Worksheet:

Invitation: We know that “That’s the way we have always done it” is probably not a mantra that will help our congregation adapt and thrive in today's changing world. While we know this, we are also not sure how to respond faithfully in these times of rapid change. We believe that there are clues to what God might have in store for us in the stories and perspectives held by the people in our congregation. Would you be willing to spend a few minutes with me so that I can learn more about what you wonder about as you look to the future of our congregation?

Questions:

1. What do you love about our congregation?
2. Share a story of a time when have you experienced God’s presence in our church.
3. Share a story of a time when have you experienced God’s presence in the surrounding community.
4. With so much change happening around us, what do you think we must not lose sight of?

Appendix B – Listening Interviews

Neighbors

Action: Conduct a series of interviews with our neighbors who live around our church building to learn from them about their hopes for the community over the next 5-10 years.

Action plan:

1. Plan to conduct 10-15 interviews with neighbors who live close to the church.
2. Determine how we will identify neighbors that might be willing to be interviewed:
 - a. Are there people who attend the church that live close by?
 - b. Are there community groups that meet in our building that might be willing to partner with us?
 - c. Are there people in our congregation that have relationships with people that live close to the church that we could invite to participate?
 - d. What other existing connections do we have that might help us with building this list?
3. Who in our congregation can help us conduct these interviews? They may be people with connections in the neighborhood or they may simply be good listeners.
 - a. How will we invite them to conduct interviews?
 - b. What does our invitation to them need to include?
 - i. Why are we doing this?
 - ii. Why are we asking you to help us?
 - iii. What is expected of you?
 1. Nature of action
 2. Timeline to complete it
 3. Tools provided
4. Use the worksheet below to take notes for each interview.
5. What is our timeline for completing this action?

Interview Worksheet:

Invitation: I am a member of [Name of your congregation] that is located in this area of the city and we are trying to get to know our neighbors and develop more awareness of what is happening around our church. We think we might have some sense of what is happening in this community but, rather than guess or assume, we would like to hear from you. Would you be willing to spend a few minutes with me so that I can learn more about how you would describe your hopes for this community over the next 5-10 years?

Questions:

1. How long have you lived in this neighborhood?
2. What are some of your favorite things to do in this community?
3. What do you like about this community?
4. As you look ahead 5-10 years, what are some of your hopes for this community?
5. Is there anything else you think I should know about this community?

Appendix C – Listening Exercise

Faith in Culture

Action: Conduct a series of interviews with people on the edge of congregational life and with people in the community to learn more about them and the place of church and faith in their lives.

Action plan:

1. Plan to conduct 10-15 interviews: 50% in the congregation and 50% in the community. If interviewing people in the community seems too daunting at this stage, focus on congregation members first.
2. Determine how we will identify people that might be willing to be interviewed:
 - a. Who are the people that we haven't seen for awhile on a Sunday morning?
 - b. Are there community groups that meet in our building that might be willing to partner with us?
 - c. Are there safe gathering places in the community where people might feel comfortable having conversations? (Library? Community Center? Cafe? etc.)
 - d. Are there people we already have relationships with in the community who don't go to church?
3. Who in our congregation can help us conduct these interviews?
 - a. How will we invite them to conduct interviews?
 - b. What does our invitation to them need to include?
 - i. Why are we doing this?
 - ii. Why are we asking you to help us?
 - iii. What is expected of you?
 1. Nature of action
 2. Timeline to complete it
 3. Tools provided
4. Use the worksheet below to take notes for each interview.
5. What is our timeline for completing this action?

Interview Worksheet:

Invitation: (I am a member of [Name of your congregation].) These days, it's less and less common for people to be part of a church community. People are busy, time is tight, attention is focused elsewhere. People in our congregation are aware of these dynamics but we would like to understand better what you are facing so we would like to hear from you. Would you be willing to spend a few minutes with me so that I can learn more about you?

Questions:

1. What are some of your favorite things to do?

2. As you look ahead, what are some of your hopes?
 - For yourself?

 - For your family?

 - For your community?

3. As you look ahead, what are some of your concerns/fears?
 - For yourself?

 - For your family?

 - For your community?

4. Does our faith community play a part in your life? If so, please describe what our faith community means to you. If not, please describe why that might be.

5. Is there anything else you think I should know?

Appendix D – Discerning Core Values

Develop a clear list of the core values by which the church operates. Core Values are those things that consistently drive the work of the ministry. Core Values are the life-giving factors for the ministry.

Presbyterian Core Values

These are theological and historical core values of the Church. Acknowledging our heritage as Presbyterians embracing the Theology of the Reformed Tradition:

- Christ alone is head of the Church
- The Word of God is truly preached and heard
- The Sacraments are rightly administered and received
- A covenant community of disciples of Christ is nurtured and strengthened
- Divine worship is maintained
- Biblical truth is preserved
- Social righteousness is promoted and exhibited to the world

We understand the Core Values to be the reason the Church exists. How are these applied to your church? What makes you unique? How do you identify yourselves living into them?

A framework for determining the core values is to ask some or all of the following questions before the discussion to get the group thinking. REMEMBER: The core values are both spiritual and operational.

- What do you most value about the work of the church?
- What are two core factors that give life to this church?
- What are some of the unique attributes of this church, without which it would not be the same?
- What theological principles guide the church?

- Which biblical standards are not to be compromised?
- What are the ideals that drive ministry?
- Other?
- Reach consensus about the most important/key Core Values.

Examples of Core Values

- Lordship of Jesus Christ
- Mission
- Bible-centered
- Inclusiveness