

WHERE JESUS LEADS

Tools for Discerning and Reaching Mission Fields

Prayer for the Mission of the Church *(BCP, 257)*

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you, bring the nations into your fold, pour out your Spirit upon all flesh, and hasten the coming of your kingdom; and grant that in our vocation and ministry we may truly and devoutly serve you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Becoming Missionaries

A missionary model goes to people in their own setting and community, becomes part of that community and serves it so that people can experience Christian life.

Traditional churches often avoid this “missionary” model of going into the world and living with others who need God’s healing love, unless they are sending gifted specialists to do this work.

Going beyond church walls opens up far more possibilities for new relationships and activities.

Churches that grow identify who they are called to serve

- Go directly to and connect with the identified group
- Understand what these people need
- Let people know that we care

A missional church asks: How are we connecting relationally with people around us?

- Who is our neighbor (needs)?
- Who are our missionaries (passions)?

Questions for Discussion among Congregational Leaders

If we look, we will see many needs both within our community and in ever widening circles around us. Who is our neighbor (mission field)?

- o What are the unique needs that we can meet? How are we being effective missionaries of God’s love to those around us? What other needs do we need to respond to?

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- What other steps might we take to identify specific mission fields (looking at our present ministries, community associations, local agencies, schools, police, walking neighborhoods, etc.)?
- What is our peculiar focus as a congregation (i.e., food, shelter, education or Christian formation vs. trying to do everything)? How will we show forth God's healing love like Jesus? How is this community called to serve God's people (in very specific, not general or abstract terms)?
- What resources or assets do you have to accomplish these goals?

How will we connect relationally both with people we serve and with people who will join us in serving?

- Where can we make relational connections?
- How can we respond to their needs for belonging and purpose?

Who are our missionaries?

- Who is passionate about these ministries and missions? Who has skills for them?
- What missionary teams do we have or can we develop?

Step 1: Knowing our surrounds: Who is our neighbor?

Identify Mission Fields: Growing church communities clearly identify who they are called to serve and go out to reach new people. The old attraction slogan ("All are Welcome") and good hospitality are not enough. It is important to identify who you are trying to reach so that you can understand their specific needs and imagine unique ways to make connections and build relationships. Be aware both of people the church already serves and of new potential mission fields. Growing church communities clearly identify who they are called to serve and go out to reach new people.

Scripture Lesson: Luke 10:25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

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Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

1. Presence

- a. Walk the neighborhood (esp. [Neighborhood Prayer Walks – The Episcopal Church](#))
- b. Community outreach (e.g., companionship, neighborhood cleanup, food, clothing, shelter, education, jobs)

2. Conversations and partnerships

- a. Local agencies (e.g., city, chamber of commerce, economic development, police, nonprofits, community associations)
- b. Community Organizing Model (e.g., [One-to-One Relational Meetings – The Episcopal Church](#))

3. Demographic Studies

See, e.g., [Study your Neighborhood — The General Convention of The Episcopal Church](#)

To get a community demographic profile for the area surrounding your church, select Search USA Congregations, then select your Diocese, then select your congregation. At the bottom of the box that pops up for your congregation, click on "Explore the Neighborhood".

These two pages include demographics about population, ages, diversity, employment types, education, marital status, languages spoken, etc. The ESRI Tapestry Segments provide more information about key demographic segments in your area.

- *Do these reports affirm what we have been learning about our surrounding community? Are there any surprises?*

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- *Who are we already making close relational connections with and who could we make close relational connections with?*
- *What are their needs?*
- *Who is passionate about these ministries and missions? Who makes these relational connections?*

Step 2: Knowing ourselves: What gifts and passions do we bring?

Identify our Missionaries and Resources: We will discover the most joy in our mission and ministry if we match our own passions, gifts and skills with the needs of the people we are serving. Who are your missionaries? Who is passionate about reaching and serving others? Who has skills for this?

Scripture Lesson: Philippians 4:6-8

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

1. Holy Conversations (Appreciative Inquiry)

- a. Break into groups of 3-6 people with a leadership team member as facilitator and note taker for each group and ask the following questions:*
 - Remember a specific time that was a high point for this church community; a time when you felt this church was doing God's work and fulfilling God's mission.
 - Name and describe three things you value most about this church community beyond our relationships with each other.
 - Think back over your whole lifetime and recall a specific time when the church (maybe this church or maybe another church) made a difference in your life. When and how did it happen? Who was involved? Why was it an important time or event?

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- Why have you made this church your faith community? What brought you here and why do you stay?
 - What will be the three most exciting and important accomplishments of this church community over the next three to five years? How will you know?
 - Are there other opportunities and challenges facing this church?
- b. Lay and clergy leaders review Holy Conversation themes and ask "Who is God calling us to be now?"*
- Look at the answers to questions i to iv of the Holy Conversations and identify the "Joys and Blessings" of this community. What are the key themes you see? This should be general themes and things the community truly values (for example, sense of community in caring for one another, hospitality, generosity in giving time, worship experiences, etc.)
 - Look at the answers to questions v and vi and identify the "Dreams and Goals" of the community. What are the key themes you see? This should be general themes and things the community truly wants to do (such as financial sustainability, growth, etc.)
 - Then ask what you would like to add to the focus areas and goals for the community (possibly in comparison to things identified in a Mutual Ministry Review)
 - Then ask how do you want to share and celebrate these results with the congregation?

2. Mutual Ministry Review¹

- a. A complete mutual ministry review process will provide
- an effective evaluation of what is going well and what needs attention (especially in terms of how well we are living our into our baptism and becoming disciples);
 - a shared vision of where God is calling the congregation; and
 - a strategy that produces clear priorities and objectives for the congregation, specific goals for achieving them, and an understanding of the shared

¹ Jim Gettel, Where Jesus Leads: Helping Christian Communities to Follow (Deep River Books, 2017), 307-316.

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expectations, formation, leadership, and resources needed to accomplish them

- b. Once you have evaluated your ministries and activities in a Mutual Ministry Review, begin to set goals for the community or ministry area, asking:
 - Are we sensing a call in certain areas?
 - What would you like to build on or do differently, if anything?
 - What do you sense God might be calling you to do in the coming year or two?
 - What one thing would you like to see enhanced or added in the coming year or two?
 - What goals would we like to set? Where (to whom) will our activities be?
 - Have specific answers to three questions for each goal:
 - a) Who (will do this)?
 - b) What (will they do)?
 - c) When (will it be done)?
 - d) How (will it be done)?
- c. Ask some additional critical questions about how you are doing with mutual ministry:
 - Have you identified leaders for each ministry?
 - Have you created teams?
 - How do you invite new people into key ministries?
 - How are you doing on leading these ministries?

3. Asset Mapping²

Brainstorm

What gifts and resources does our church community have?

- Physical Assets – building, property, garden, etc.
- Individual Assets – skills, knowledge

² See, e.g., Called to Transformation: An Asset-Based Approach to Engaging Church and Community (www.calledtoformation.org). See also, Cameron Harder, Discovering the Other: Asset-Based Approaches for Building Community Together (Alban, 2013).

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- Associations – people, partnerships
- Institutions – diocese, TEC
- Community assets – values, belonging, purpose
- Economic Assets – money

Dream

Which gifts have we unwrapped and used? Which gifts do we need to celebrate and give thanks for?

Which gifts need to be unwrapped and used?

What gifts could we use more fully to:

- a. Connect with people?
- b. Share God's love?
- c. Contribute to the world?

Discern and Plan

What areas seem most important to focus on at this time?

Who (will do this)? What (will they do)? When (will it be done)?

Step 3: Intentionally Building Connecting Relationships

Developing Mission Teams: Most of our committees, commissions, task forces, ministry teams, etc. focus primarily on the tasks (purposes, duties) they are trying to accomplish. Mission teams are also designed to intentionally build powerful connecting relationships (belonging) with people within and beyond the church community. We can make these connections through personal relationships or groups that create powerful experiences of belonging and purpose.

How Jesus Connects with People³

We intentionally develop deeper relationships with others by asking:

- "What are you going through?" (listening, caring, deep conversation)
- "What do we need to pray about?" (prayer)

³ Jim Gettel, Where Jesus Leads: Helping Christian Communities to Follow (Deep River Books, 2017), 159-161.

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- “Who isn’t here who needs to be here?” (openness and growth)

Which of Our Teams are or can be Missional?

These relationships can be supported in all ongoing ministries. We can invite new people (even non-members) into ministry teams for

- Pastoral care,
- Outreach,
- Prayer,
- Formation or conversations (small groups, other shared activities), or
- Specific needs along life stages of their journeys (e.g., youth, young parents, seniors, grief groups)

This can begin in groups where two or three are gathered – not the whole church. (There can be parallel development of multiple groups and everyone doesn’t have to participate.) Try to create these strong relationships within all of your groups in the congregation and beyond.

While these teams are accomplishing specific tasks, they can also help support each person’s spiritual journey – if they are intentional about this. We engage in a more integrated/holistic Christian Way that all at once invites us into loving community, serves the world, and transforms our lives.

The relationships in small groups and ministry teams help the teams grow. People who are involved in small groups and ministry teams are also more active in worship and other church activities. *Evangelism, discipleship, leadership development and church growth occur primarily in small groups and ministry teams.*

Creating Effective Mission Teams

1. Each team needs:
 - a. 3-5 members to start and a plan to grow to 9 to 12 members
 - b. To hold meetings at a regular and convenient time during the week and not less often than twice per month – so people do not lose touch with one another even if they occasionally miss a meeting
 - c. To meet outside the church – perhaps in someone’s home or a coffee shop or restaurant or library – so people who do not feel comfortable going to church may feel at home
 - d. To have fun together, to share their needs, hurts and encouragements, and to pray for one another
2. The most important factor for success is good leadership
 - a. Leaders provide structure and create a safe space for members to interact

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- i. Convene the group
 - ii. Make sure everyone participates
 - iii. Encourage each person to experience caring, support and growth
 - iv. Help the group develop an atmosphere of prayer, openness, faith sharing, trust, safety, honest respect, tolerance and love
 - v. Show enthusiasm and energy to attract and encourage other members
 - b. This kind of leadership is not limited to “experts” or specially gifted individuals
 - i. The subject matter, content or task (theology, ministry) of the group or team is less important than the relational connections. We too often rely on (require) subject matter “experts” (such as clergy) to lead groups.
 - ii. Leadership studies confirm that leadership skills are quite broadly distributed among people, and leadership is not limited to “natural born leaders” or people with special gifts for leadership.
 - iii. People can develop leadership skills and abilities through practice, experience and learning
 - iv. Any Christian involved in serving others will ultimately discover that the Holy Spirit provides gifts and helps us do far more than we could ever do on our own
 - c. Part of growing and replicating groups or teams is always apprenticing other members to lead them
 - i. Have designated co-leaders so the group is covered when the leader is absent and so a second leader develops to lead future groups
 - ii. Over time, select and support apprentice leaders and help them to develop leadership skills and abilities to lead teams of their own
3. Teams need consistent and effective practices for developing relationships in the team
 - a. Make time to greet one another
 - b. Talk with one another about the group focus and daily life. Ask the question: “What are you going through?” (listening, caring)
 - c. Encourage deeper conversations (beyond cocktail level conversation about weather, sports, work, vacations, children to hopes, dreams, aspirations, struggles, grief)
 - d. Ask the question, “Who isn’t here who needs to be here?” (permeability, growth)
 - e. Ask the question, “What do we need to pray about?” (prayer) and have time for sharing and praying for one another’s thanksgivings and concerns
4. To create a loving culture in the team, have a safe boundaries and expectations (a “behavioral covenant”). Some things to ask of all participants are:
 - a. Be open: Make room for God to do something new in your life.
 - b. Be transparent: As you openly share your hopes, fears, successes and failures, God will use your life experiences to build faith and courage in the lives of others.
 - c. Be available: to God and to each other. Get to know other members of the group. Keep your eyes open for opportunities to encourage and pray for one another.

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- d. Create a safe environment: Make the group a community where people can be heard and feel loved (no quick answers, snap judgments or simple fixes), and keep discussions confidential among group members.
 - e. Be committed: Take this opportunity and commit yourself to make your group life a priority by attending meetings and keeping up with any tasks you have committed to.
 - f. Invite and welcome newcomers: Be clear that we are always open and welcoming and looking for people to join us on the Way. Be permeable to new members; we can always learn from others, wherever they are on their spiritual journeys, and being part of a clique does not really make us safe or help us share with one another or grow. We are committed to incorporating new people and to multiplying and dividing into new groups or teams as our group or team grows.
 - g. Keep your focus on God and your faith: Resist the temptation to make discussions a critical and intellectual theological enterprise; listen for what God is doing and wants to do in your life.
 - h. Consider becoming a group or team leader or co-leader and begin helping with leadership tasks: The strongest teams trade off responsibilities so that people can try and learn new roles. Remember, Jesus prepared his disciples to eventually go and confidently lead others. Steps of invitation, apprenticeship, training, experience and encouragement lead to success and confidence.
5. Leaders encourage and support teams with training, coaching and resources.
- a. Communities trained in pastoral care and small groups are most effective.
 - i. Programs for training in pastoral care are Community of Hope, Stephen's Ministries, or Befrienders
 - ii. The objective is not just to prepare people to provide pastoral care, but to enable them to create stronger and deeper relationships that share God's love with others (by listening, caring, offering prayer, deepening conversations)
 - b. Small group training helps prepare people to create strong relational connections in group settings and to lead, grow, replicate and divide group ministries.