

Information: When Does a Church Need a Mission Study?

The first question that is asked about mission studies is; “Why do we have to do a mission study?” The common answer is; “Because Presbytery said so.” Most often this is a time of leadership change or crisis in the church. The study is done, but ignored when the crisis passes. This leads to time and money being spent on expensive documents, which sit on the shelf and gather dust.

Why and when, then, should we do a mission study? Mission studies are needed to help the church make a strategic use of its time and resources. When there is no strategic plan, in use, churches may be very busy doing Christian works without focusing their attention on the call of God to their particular church and the needs in the world around them. It may be appropriate to do a mission study under any of the following circumstances:

- When there is a need for fresh vision or insight, a new direction, or perhaps redevelopment.
- When staffing changes are desired or imminent.
- Because a church is in some transition at a time of pastoral change, and because it is important to be clear about a church vision, plans and goals when seeking to call a pastor, we ask that a congregation do a mission study prior to completing their Church Information Form (CIF) unless they have completed one within the past year.
- When the community changes or has changed since the last strategic plan.
- At times of congregational change, including changes in;
 - ▶ Attendance
 - ▶ Aging
 - ▶ Patterns of giving
- When there is no current plan in use (At these times we may say, “but we already have a mission statement/plan.” Yet nobody knows where it is, or it has no impact on what the church is doing).
- When a pastoral relationship is well established and the pastor and church want to keep their ministry and relationship vital and alive.

At any of these times it may be appropriate to conduct a mission study. If several of these factors are at work in your church a mission study may be of critical importance at this time in the life and ministry of your church.

If you desire to conduct a mission study resources and support are available from the Committee on Ministry through your representative or the presbytery office.

Characteristic Elements of Mission Study

Mission Studies should include the following characteristic parts:

- Demographic information about the church and its community.
- Biblical study and reflection on the church, its mission, and its setting.
- A written summary document, which expresses both a vision and the plans to implement that vision.

Resources for Mission Studies:

Demographic Information

- PERCEPT 1 800 442-6277
- General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) 1 888 728-7228 #5 126
- Visions — Decisions: A Web based resource for churches and ministries. Web address: www.visions-decisions.com or info@visions-decisions.com; toll-free number: 800-524-1445; fax: 404-351-6380; address: PO Box, 94144, Atlanta, GA 30377
- Local County Planning Office, Economic Development District, PUDs
- Congregational Demographic Information may be obtained from the General Assembly Web site (www.pcusa.org); this includes Reported Attendance, Membership, and Giving for the past ten years.
- Additional Congregational Information may be obtained by survey if desired. Biblical Study and Reflection
- Natural Church Development (available at the Presbytery Office). E-mail address: churchsmart@compuserve.com; toll-free number: 800-253—4276.
- Redevelopment Notebook. Office of the General Assembly (available at the Presbytery Office)
- Discerning Your Congregation's Future, Oswald / Friedrich (available at the Presbytery Office)
- "God's Visions for God's People," Two Part Article, Net Results, July and August 2000 Issues, (available at the Presbytery Office)
- A Guide to Missions Studies, Presbytery of the Cascades (available at the Presbytery Office)
- The Cottage lake model, based on, Discerning Your Congregation's Future, Oswald / Friedrich, Developed and used summer of 2000. (available at the Presbytery Office)
- Smaller Church Mission Study Guide, Hank Blunk (a classic study not limited to small congregations) (available at the Presbytery Office)
- Congregation Mission Studies, Office of the General Assembly, DMS 305-91-901 (available at the Presbytery Office)
- Handbook for Congregational Studies, Carrol, Dudley, McKinney (available at the Presbytery Office)
- Revision, PERCEPT Inc. 1 800 442-6277
- The Church Growth Handbook, William M. Easum (available at the Presbytery Office)

Written Vision Statements, and Work Plans

Most of the reflection and study materials will lead into a written report, plan, or mission statement. Some will use retreats, or special meetings to refine these documents. The key

elements of every report are the following:

- A Common understanding of VISION:
 - ▶ What are we here for?
 - ▶ Where are we going?
- A statement of MISSION:
 - ▶ What do we do to accomplish our Vision
- A PLAN for mission:
 - ▶ When will we do what?
 - ▶ Who will do it?
 - ▶ How do we evaluate it?
 - ▶ What will our next steps be?

Mission Structure and Design Considerations

The Mission Study process is not complete unless there are means designed to implement the plan. The church's structure, organization, and staffing need to be examined in order to determine any needs for change to implement the plan.

As a church more fully catches its vision, and begins to see what its new mission looks like, plans, structure, organization and staffing may need to be changed. Evaluation becomes crucial.