

CHAPTER 5: The Mission Exploration Process and the Development of the Congregational Mission Profile

Introduction -- Mission Exploration Process -- The Congregational Mission Profile -- The Congregational "Debriefing" Meeting

Introduction

The Mission Exploration Process takes place prior to the calling of a new pastor or an associate in ministry. It is important in several ways: First, it provides the opportunity to review and assess the mission and ministry of the congregation. Second, it provides the Call Committee with basic information and a description of leadership needs which will guide their work. Third, the profile will assist the bishop in recommending candidates to be considered by the Call Committee. Fourth, it provides a picture of the congregation for the candidates as they consider serving the congregation.

TIME FRAME: 3 months to 1 year

WHO: It is recommended that your Congregation Council appoint a **Mission Exploration Team (MET)** that will be responsible for the Mission Exploration Process and the completion of the Congregational Mission Profile.

The **MET** is separate from the **Call Committee**. The Call Committee serves after the mission exploration process is complete. It is responsible for receiving names, determining the candidate visit and interview process, conducting interviews and bringing a candidate to the congregation. The Call Committee is established in compliance with your constitution. There should be representation from the Mission Exploration Team on the Call Committee, including one member (non-voting) from outside the congregation.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of the Mission Exploration Process is to enable the congregation to:

- Claim ownership of the mission of the congregation and the call process
- Review the congregation's life and mission as the Church, the Body of Christ
- Discuss the church's challenges/opportunities in next 5-10 years
- Evaluate the congregation's present strengths
- Identify specific areas where the congregation needs to strengthen its ministry
- Specify resources necessary to fulfill the mission of the congregation especially the mission in the parish community.
- Arrive at a current understanding of the mission of the congregation
- Identify the gifts that are most important for the next pastor to possess

The Mission Exploration Process

- The Mission Exploration Team (MET) leads a process that seeks to define future directions and priorities for the mission and ministry of the congregation.
- The Team is appointed by the Congregation Council in conversation with the interim and the Synod staff person. To help the focus toward mission, the team should include at least two participants who are not members of the congregation. (You may consider representation from a neighboring ELCA congregation, partner congregations, the community, the cluster dean, or persons from programs housed in your church building. The Interim pastor or a Synod staff person can help identify persons.)
- The team plans an interactive process which involves the congregation in building a vision for mission and compiling data for the profile. (See Possible Format for Mission Exploration Process - next page)
- A facilitator should be identified as the team is formed. This key role can be played by the Interim pastor. In addition the MET will determine its own leadership and communication structure.
- The expected outcomes of the MET process:
 1. **A statement of mission including completion of the Congregational Mission Profile.**
 2. **A definition of the outreach expectations for ministry in the community of the congregation.**
 3. **Identification of the Mission Partnerships of the congregation within the community, in the Synod, and beyond.**
 4. **A defined commitment to at least 4 mission strategies for the congregation for the next 5 years.**
(i.e. working with community youth, developing a community based bible study, working on an anti-racism program, building a hospitality relationship with gay and lesbian persons.)
 5. **A concrete plan for evaluating the mission strategy, and a plan for accountability to others in the community.**

Further comments on the MET PROCESS:

- This work may be undertaken apart from a pastor announcing her/his intention of leaving, (It can profitably be an ongoing part of congregational planning.)
- The focus is on the congregation and not on the pastoral leadership
- The intent is to increase congregational awareness and participation in the mission of the congregation.
- The mission exploration time helps a congregation see itself through the eyes of the community, and in the larger picture of being a congregation in the ELCA
- The involvement of community resources, other congregations and the synod staff is important to this process.

FORMATION AND SELECTION OF A MISSION EXPLORATION TEAM (MET)

WHEN SHOULD A MET BEGIN?

The process of a MET formation is usually led by the interim pastor in conjunction with the church council. The timing of the formation of team will depend on the needs and concerns in a congregation. An interim with the council will consider such factors as:

- The length of time in the parish of the previous pastor. Congregations where previous pastorates were over 15 years often need more time before a MET can be effective.
- The conditions under which the previous pastor left can affect the ability of a congregation to begin a MET process. If a pastor left because of conflict with the congregation or leadership the interim will need time to begin a healing process prior to any MET work.
- The degree of health of a congregation in terms of the worshipping community, the administration, leadership, and the social communities are all important factors in an interim's work. A MET will begin after the interim has begun work in assessing the specific needs of the congregation.
- The history and past work of a congregation is also very important in the decision of when to begin a MET. If a pastor leaves after a healthy pastorate, and the congregation has worked on vision and mission in recent years, a MET may begin within a month or two of the interim's arrival.

The interim pastor needs to work on building trust and settling into the rhythm of a congregation before a MET can begin.

MET SELECTION

The selection of a MET is done by the church council under the leadership of the interim. The selection process is very important. The persons selected are responsible for several areas of endeavor including:

- * Assessment of the congregation's history and how it functions now.
- * Leadership in determining the congregation's mission and direction for the next 5 years.
- * Determining concrete steps for mission.
- * Completing the ELCA congregational profile

Thus the team will need to be people who can make a serious time commitment. It will best be served by persons who are not "stuck" in their own personal ideas and visions. They must be able to consider a broad perspective of ministry, and they must be able to represent the various demographics and opinions within the congregation. It is helpful to have some team members who understand the Lutheran heritage and the structures of the ELCA.

The number of people on the team should not be less than 6. When there are more than 12 persons the work may become too cumbersome to coordinate and complete.

(See questions page 5 for MET development)

MET ORIENTATION

The interim and Synod staff person will meet with the team for an orientation session. The Synod staff person will be available for periodic meetings if necessary.

MET COMMUNICATION

The MET will be report regularly to the congregation. Regular reports to the congregation's council are expected. In addition, MET's should plan regular updates in weekly worship bulletins and monthly newsletters.

MET TEAM DEVELOPMENT

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

WHO NEEDS TO SERVE ON THE TEAM?

Demographic considerations: (Age, gender, congregational involvement, membership years, social groups, racial group, etc.)

Preferred size if team:

Characteristics needed on team: (open minded, visibility in worship, variety of experiences within congregation)

HOW WILL THE TEAM BE SELECTED?

How will names be solicited?

How will decision be made?
(see sample chart)

HOW WILL THE TEAM BE PREPARED FOR WORK?

How will team be gathered?

Who will gather the team for its first meeting?

HOW WILL THE TEAM RELATE TO COUNCIL/LEADERSHIP TEAM?

HOW WILL THE TEAM BE INSTALLED/COMMISSIONED?

**MISSION EXPLORATION TEAM
APPLICATION FOR PARTICIPATION**

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE #'S: HOME: _____

CELL: _____

WORK: _____

E-MAIL: _____

CONGREGATIONAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

PAST PARTICIPATION:

CURRENT PARTICIPATION:

JOB/WORK/SKILLS/ DUTIES:

GIFTS/PASSIONS:

**YOUR VISION FOR WHAT THIS CONGREGATION MIGHT BECOME:
(2-4 SENTENCES)**

A Format for the Mission Exploration Process

Before the MET begins the work of filling out the Congregational Mission Profile, it is helpful to gather a sense of the congregation, its neighborhood, and the community. The following suggestions will serve as a guide. It is important to create opportunities for congregation members to be involved in the process.

ASSESSMENT:

Step 1: **Who we are:**

1. **What is our history?**

* Why was this congregation formed?

- * Who were the founders?
- * Are there any original/old mission or vision statements?

Idea:

Create a wall of history. Cover one wall of the fellowship hall with paper. Create a time line from the beginning of the congregation through today. You may want to leave a portion at the end for dreams for the future. (See "Scripting Parish History" in Chapter 12/Appendix.)

Give everyone a marker and have them put important events and people on the wall. Information can be about your church, or society at large. (Wars, depressions, disasters affect the ministry too.)

Have people gather in small groups and review the wall. ASK: "What do you see? What's missing?"

Ask each group to create one or two sentences that describe who you are.

Question; How have we changed? What has not changed? Are we who we were intended to be?

2. What do we say about ourselves?

a. Look at recent (at least one year's) newsletters/ annual reports/ bulletins/ads/ brochures:

- * What does it say about mission?

Global

Synod

Local

- What do they say about areas of concern within the congregation?
- * What would a "non-member" find out about you?

b. Survey worshipping congregation.

Idea:

For 3-4 Sundays ask folks in worship to respond to a written question.

Sunday #1 : **What do you like about this congregation?**

Insert a ½ sheet of paper with the question printed at the top. Ask folks during announcements to answer the question as best as they can.

Sunday # 2: **What one thing would you like to see improved in this congregation?**

Insert a ½ sheet of paper with the 2nd question printed at the top.

Include a complete list of the previous Sunday's answers, so folks see the responses. It is important to include every response.

Sunday #3 **How do you feel about worship? (Any praise or suggestions?)**

Insert 3rd question. Print answers to 2nd Sunday's questions

Sunday #4: **As a community how are we doing with sharing the good news of Jesus with our neighbors and those in need? (Any suggestions)**

Insert 4th question: Print answers to 3rd.

Question: How do we perceive ourselves? Is there a common sense in what we say about ourselves? Are people satisfied with the way things are?

3. How do others describe us?

ELCA: are you seen as a partner in Synod or Cluster activities?

How do you participate in the "larger church"?

Local: How are you involved in the community?

What do neighbors think about your congregation?

Idea: Visit 10 –20 homes in your area. Ask two questions.

Have you had any contact with our church?

(What was your impression? What is your impression of us?)

What do you think is the biggest concern facing our community?

Idea 2: Make an appointment to see local leaders and ask the same two questions:

(Include: Bankers, principals, local government folk, help agencies, YMCA OR YWCA leaders, other pastors or church leaders, etc.)

Question: Does the love of Christ shine forth from our congregation? How ?

Complete the "Who Are We" Worksheet

WORKSHEET ---WHO ARE WE?

What has the MET team learned about the congregation?

Write a paragraph describing what you have learned about your congregation.

Step 2: Where are we located? What is the community we serve?

In this step the MET is beginning to look at mission and purpose of the congregation. As the people of God we are called serve those in need and to share the good news of Jesus with all people. The “where” question focuses on the context of the congregation. It is an opportunity to begin to look at the need and opportunities for sharing the good news of Jesus.

1. What is the specific geography of your congregation?

Idea 1: Create a community map

Break into small groups with a piece of newsprint. Each group create a map of the community being sure to put in all the details.

Put the various maps on the wall. Ask: “What do you see?”

Idea 2: Walk or drive through community.

Have small groups walk or drive through the community. Silently each person notes the signs of hope and the signs of despair in your community.

Have people gather afterwards to share their observations.

Question: What are the specific needs of your community? Where did you see signs of hope or signs of despair in your community?

2. What groups of people (demographics), businesses, institutions are in your congregational boundaries?

Create a list of these groups or institutions on a large piece of paper.

Ask : What do we see?

Ask: Are these folks represented in our congregation? Why or why not?

3. What or who is missing?

Create a second list of groups of people or institutions which are not in your boundaries. Who is missing?

(Groups of people of color? Rich folks, poor folks, banks, other congregations, non-Christian communities,

Question: What are the strengths of your geographical location? What are the weaknesses or opportunities?

WORKSHEET---- WHERE ARE WE LOCATED:

MAKE A LIST OF THE ASSETS OF YOUR COMMUNITY:

MAKE A LIST OF THE NEEDS OF YOUR COMMUNITY:

WRITE A PARAGRAPH DESCRIBING YOUR COMMUNITY AS A MISSION SITE.

STEP 3: What Is Outreach?

Basically the MET assesses what a congregation is doing in order to set a path for mission. Often Outreach gets confused with membership growth and development. The basic question for this section is: "How does your congregation share the love of God through Jesus Christ in your community? How do people come to know Jesus through you?"

1. Arrange a time for a presentation on Outreach with Synod staff person.
2. Define current outreach efforts / initiatives of the congregation.
3. Look at the church budget. What does it say about the value of outreach in your congregation?

Idea: Plan an Outreach night having the synod Prophet lead a discussion on outreach.

Question: Where is your congregation in its sense of Outreach? What are some possible opportunities for growth?

WORKSHEET--- WHAT IS OUTREACH

LIST THE OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES CURRENTLY AVAILABLE IN YOUR CONGREGATION:

CREATE A LIST OF NEW POSSIBILITIES

CREATE A POSSIBLE OUTREACH PLAN FOR THE CONGREGATION:

SECTION 4: Assessing our Mission

In this section a MET looks at the current mission of the congregation and sets priorities for the future.

Key questions to be answered in this section include:

What have we learned about our mission and ourselves?

What is our outreach plan?

What is the relationship of the congregation with the community?

Who are our mission partners?

What is our mission focus now...where are we being led?

Idea: Arrange for a presentation time to clarify current programs and efforts of the congregation.

Look at the difference between self-interest and selfishness.

Look at Congregations partnerships:

Ask:

Is it global, synod-connected, local

Who is being served?

How does this mission strengthen who we are?

Who is involved? (names, groups,)

What are the hoped for outcomes within the congregation and for the mission partner? (How are we doing?)

Idea: Have a mission Day. Include Synod, ELCA missions you support in your Benevolence as well as sister congregation partnerships.

WORKSHEET --- MISSION ASSESSMENT

| Mission Partner | Global/ Synod/local | Money given/ received | Benefit to congregation | Need being met |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
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SECTION 5: DEVELOPMENT OF A MISSION PLAN

After listening and assessment comes the task of creating of a plan for the congregation. The plan needs to include a vision with a specific strategy to work toward the vision.

Key questions for this section:

What of our current mission needs to be preserved?

(Current projects, plans, mission statements?)

What are our gifts?

What is our Mission?

How has our mission changed?

What do we expect of our pastor in our mission work?

What do we expect of the congregation's members?

Write a mission statement or review current statement for relevancy. (See appendix "Mission Statement Approaches")

Idea: Have a working session to look at church bulletins, newsletters, annual reports, financial reports. Ask:

- What does this say about our mission?
- What is missing?
- How might we strengthen our mission emphasis?

Idea: Have a spiritual gift seminar for the congregation.

(Interim pastor can help locate a person to lead this kind of event.)

Idea: Create a list of gifts needed for mission work in your congregation.

Identify resources in congregation and community

WORKSHEET---MISSION OF THE CONGREGATION

MISSION STATEMENT:



List 3-5 Mission goals for the next 3 years:

Who will be responsible for seeing that the mission goals are addressed?

SECTION 5: PREPARATION OF THE WRITTEN MATERIALS

The MET team will present its final work at a congregational meeting. Usually a synod staff person together with the Bishop will attend this meeting to listen to the response of the congregation. Materials need to be prepared ahead of time and shared with the Synod staff person and the congregation at least one week prior to this important “DEBRIEFING MEETING.”

The written report of the MET may have any number of formats. But the materials produced should include:

- 1. The mission statement**
- 2. A mission strategy for the next 3 years.**
(This should include specific goals)
- 3. A survey of mission partnerships both active and potential**
- 4. A plan for evaluation and review of mission plans**
- 5. The Congregational Mission Profile**
- 6. A concrete plan for evaluating the ongoing mission work**

A FINAL NOTE:

In reading this description of the Mission Exploration Process some will think this is a lot of unnecessary work—“Let’s just fill out the forms.” It is true, it is hard work. But it is also true that congregations that take time to do the work invariably describe it as among the most useful elements of the entire call process. It is well worth the effort.

The Mission Exploration Team will take time to present the Mission Exploration information, the Congregational Mission Profile, and recommendations for style and characteristics of pastoral leadership to the council, the congregation and the call committee (at the congregational de-briefing meeting, pg. 27.).

C. The Congregational Mission Profile

The MET process includes working on the Congregational Mission Profile. This is a form used throughout the ELCA. (See Chapter 12/Appendix). The Congregational Mission Profile has four parts:

Part I. Congregational Information (Items 1 through 7)

- Before recording membership or attendance statistics, talk to the people responsible for these numbers. When was the last time the membership rolls were updated? How accurate are your church records? What is the policy for maintaining accurate records? (An interim pastor can help if work needs to be done in this area.)

(Section 1 of MET)

Part II- Ministry Practices, Structure, Future

- Copies of newsletters, annual reports, or brochures on various aspects of ministry are good additions to this section.

Part III- Mission in the Community

- This is an opportunity to take a serious look at your community. Plan a day to have someone from outside your church re-introduce your congregation to the community. (A local history buff, a community organizer, a neighboring pastor may be good resources for this.)
- It is helpful to draw on materials, information and resources gathered during the MET Process sessions to learn from others about how your congregation is perceived and what some of the basic needs of the community may be.

(Section 2-4 of MET)

Part IV- The Leader We Seek

- Most Call Committees survey the congregation to identify the characteristics of the pastor they seek. Note: While helpful, most people will think primarily in terms of worship and their own personal relationship with the Pastor. The call committee is to use this information along with the rest of the profile to establish the key leadership needs.

Each section is designed to create opportunities for a congregation to think about who they are and what the mission and ministry of the congregation is. *It is a guide. Many sections will take a significant amount of energy, research and conversation to complete.*

How to Complete the Congregational Mission Profile

A small group is expected to find the information for the profile. Information gathering can be done in many ways. Congregations often use:

- Surveys
- Demographics and congregational statistics from the ELCA (Go to the ELCA Home Page at www.elca.org. In box on left, click on "congregations." Fill in zip code or State/City, click on "Locate!" Click on the name of the congregation. Click on "Trend Report for this Congregation.")
- The annual Parochial report that your congregation fills out for the synod each year.
- Congregation treasurer
- Focus groups

- Interviews with individuals or committees
- Other congregational records
- The local chamber of commerce, City hall, business associations, libraries
- Interviews with interim pastor
- Conversations with other local pastors

D. Tying It All Together - The Congregational "Debriefing" Meeting

The final written report should contain a summary of the material collected for the mission exploration, a copy of the Congregational Mission Profile, and copies of any other documents or materials that will be illustrative of the conclusions. These materials should be distributed prior to the congregational debriefing meeting. (Note: Synod staff person should receive the materials no less than one week prior to the meeting.)

While this material is being put together, the committee should be in contact with the Synod to set a congregation meeting for de-briefing.

Usually the Bishop and the Synod staff person working with the congregation will be present to participate in the de-briefing.

At the debriefing, the MET team and Call Committee present the results of their work. The congregation is expected to discuss and approve the document at this meeting, along with the Bishop and/or Staff present. The purpose of this meeting is to gain clear congregational buy-in, and insure a good common ground of understanding between congregation, synod, and call committee. The meeting ends with congregational affirmation of the MET report and congregational profile. Together, these constitute the Mission Profile that becomes the base for future decisions.

Upon approval, the Synod will review possible candidates who fit the needs of the congregation based on the mission profile presented at the debriefing. (See Chapter 7.) While the Synod is preparing to bring names the Call Committee prepares for the actual interview process. (See Chapter 8.) All potential candidates are to receive copies of the entire MET report.

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Evaluation

Throughout the Call Process, periodic evaluation is helpful to assess if things are working well so far (see Chapter 11). After the Mission Profile has been created, it's a good time to ask some questions in review. (Similar evaluation questions are also offered in Chapter 8, 10, and 11.)

Needs Evaluation - (To be completed after the congregational profile/leadership profile have been created)

1. Did the process we used get the job done? What worked well? Not so well?
2. What did it cost (consider time, money, materials, etc.) to develop to assess the congregation's needs?
3. Did the process ensure input from a cross section of the congregation?
4. Do we know how to proceed?
5. Were the interim, synod staff and materials helpful along the way? Why or why not?
6. Do we know what type of pastor we need?