Mission Study Overview

***What Is a Mission Study and Why is it helpful***

The term, “mission study” literally refers to “studying the mission of a church.” It is an opportunity for a church to reexamine its ministry goals; its previous and future leadership needs; its ministry activities; and whether its ministry is meeting the current needs of the congregation and its surrounding community.

A Mission Study is also a way to review a congregation’s utilization of resources and energy as it implements the church’s mission. In this process a local church is able to reaffirm and /or restructure its vision of mission, ministry, and volunteer and staff leadership model for a five to ten-year period.

Congregations conduct mission studies for specific reasons. Often, mission studies are conducted because of a recent or planned pastoral transition. With information about community, membership, finances and pastoral leadership needs from the mission study, the church can articulate to potential pastoral candidates its mission in the near and distant future. It also assists the Pastoral Nominating Committee (PNC) with its task of completing the Ministry Discernment Profile requesting a description of the church and its ministries. While Winnebago Presbytery does not require that a mission study be completed as part of a search for a pastor, we do strongly recommend this process.

Churches may also consider a mission study in the following circumstances:

* When more than five years have elapsed since the previous mission study
* When the community in which the church is located is changing (industry moves in or out, demographics shift, etc…)
* When there has been a major change in the congregation (a split, a significant increase or decrease in resources, a significant change in non-pastoral staff, etc…)

The resulting product of a mission study is then helpful to a session in understanding its current conditions, as well as a holistic and historic portrait of the church.

If a Session undertakes a mission study, a critical review of the church’s current circumstances will occur in a comprehensive manner. Frequently, a session avoids conducting a mission study because it is perceived as an added and unnecessary step that delays the search for a pastor. On the contrary, a call process after a mission study is often more streamlined and more focused because the PNC and Session have a clear understanding of the kind of candidate they are seeking.

***How is a Mission Study Developed***

The Session is ultimately responsible for the Mission Study. The Session may appoint a team, task group or sub-committee to do the work (in many cases this is the PNC). The Session is also responsible for allocating funding for the task. When the work is complete the Mission Study is submitted to the Session for review and adoption. It is then sent to presbytery for reference purposes.

The primary goal of the Mission Study is to comprehensively reflect upon the history of the congregation, review the current status, and set a direction for the future of the congregation in the areas of:

* Spiritual Health
* Membership and Church Growth
* Finances and Stewardship
* Pastoral Leadership
* Congregational, community, and worldwide mission
* Alignment of volunteers, staff, and budget to support goals of congregation

Data gathered is used to make recommendations to the Session for the future of the congregation.

There are five general steps to the Mission Study process.

1. Reflection – “Where have we come from?” What are the events, activities, issues, important stories, and people that have affected who we are today?
2. Gathering Information – “Who are we?”
   1. Membership Trends
   2. Program Trends
   3. Financial Trends
   4. Community Trends
   5. Pastoral Trends

This information can be gathered in a variety of ways including Congregational Meetings and Small Group Discussion, Questionnaire (mailed, emailed, hard copy etc.).

There should also be a time of information sharing with the congregation. Compile the data and provide opportunities for reflection and feedback from the whole congregation.

1. Analyzing the data – “So What?”
   1. How have our characteristics and the characteristics of the community influenced what we have done and what we can do? How has our history brought us to this time and place?
2. Envisioning - “Now What?”
   1. Now that we know where we’ve come from and where we are – what do we want to become?
   2. What is God’s call for this church and what is our mission?
   3. What are our dreams for this congregation?
   4. What needs to stay the same?
   5. What needs to change?
3. Strategic Planning
   1. Who is your target community?
   2. How will you accomplish the mission with measureable goals?

Once completed, the final report that has been approved by the Session will be shared with the congregation and forwarded to the presbytery.