

Guiding Principles for Congregational Mission Planning

Congregational Mission Planning

As people of faith, we trust that God is doing a new thing in the world and we long to be part of this work. Congregational mission planning is the process of discovering how each community of faith is called to live as the body of Christ.

Mission planning can be accomplished in many and various ways. In some congregations, mission planning is a regular and ongoing topic for conversation. In some, mission planning is a new way to think about the ministry of the church. In all situations, there are a few guiding principles that can help congregations think about how to proceed with developing a mission plan.

Mission planning involves three great listenings – listening to God through scripture and prayer; listening to the community outside our doors; listening within the household of faith.

*I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
– Ephesians 3:18-19*

What does this mean? Identifying what God is up to in the world and in the community and determining how we are called to be involved in God's work involves intentional and thoughtful listening. Mission planning is rooted in listening through scripture and prayer for the Holy Spirit's guidance and direction. Mission planning also listens to the voices of people in the community – those within the faith community and those outside the doors of the congregation.

Mission planning is relational and fosters partnerships.

But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. – Ephesians 4:15

What does this mean? We are part of an interdependent body. Planning connects us with the wider church through synodical resources and programs (through the director for evangelical mission, and other available resources), to other congregations in the community (Lutheran, ecumenical partners, or others), to area social ministry organizations (such as Lutheran Social Services agencies), to church educational partners (colleges and schools) or to global companions. Building relationships with these partners takes time, energy and intention.

Every congregation is uniquely gifted by God.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. – 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

What does this mean? God has gifted us greatly! Mission plans are grounded in the conviction that God has given us all we need in order to do what God calls us to do. Mission planning focuses on the assets, strengths, unique resources and opportunities that God has graciously shared with each congregation and invites us to identify how we will steward what God has entrusted to us, set priorities and monitor progress.

Mission planning pays attention to context.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. – Acts 1:8

From one ancestor [God] made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For “In him we live and move and have our being.” – Acts 17:26-28a

What does this mean? Congregational mission plans are contextual, taking into account the cultural realities of the congregation’s neighborhood and community, and being mindful of the socio-economic, ethnic-specific and multicultural dynamics of the congregation’s setting. These realities apply in our engagement in our global context as well. Through baptism God has formed us into the body of Christ and enabled us to love and serve our neighbor. Mission planning gets us outside of the walls of our church and into the world where we seek to learn how to love God through our neighbor.

Mission planning is a shared journey.

“...friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.” What they said pleased the whole community... – Acts 6:3-5a

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way.” – Luke 10:1-3a

What does this mean? Effective mission planning is the work of an entire congregation. There may be a small group of people involved in the hands-on work and planning activities, but the whole congregation is engaged through prayer, discernment and other forms of participation and support as well as sharing a commitment to the actions that emerge from the planning process.

Mission planning is ongoing.

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” – John 8:31-32

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” – Colossians 2:6-7

What does this mean? We are always in the process of discerning how God is calling us to live together as a community of faith as well as how we will set priorities and steward the resources God has entrusted to us. Ongoing attention to mission planning gives congregations the opportunity to be attentive to shifts in congregational, community or neighborhood dynamics and to remain focused on the ways that living out our baptismal call continually changes.

Additional Resources for Congregation Mission Planning are available at www.ELCA.org/missionplanning.

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