

MESSAGING YOUR MISSION

Introduction

Every church has a mission statement; many are beautifully worded and well-thought-out. However, these mission statements are written for a very specific audience — church members or people who are looking for a new church to join. To the wider community, especially your neighbors who aren't active in a church, church mission statements often sound obscure and exclusive. Every church needs to be able to talk about itself and what it cares about in a way that is accessible and inspiring to a diverse audience of community members, especially those neighbors with whom the church would like to work.

Finding an accessible way to talk about your church is even more important when you are seeking community partners to use your space. Everyone who uses your building will be associated with you, and vice versa — mission alignment is one of the most important factors for a successful and mutually beneficial space-sharing initiative. You should be able to see your church's values reflected in all the activities your building hosts, whether or not those are religious activities.

This exercise will help your church council, staff or outreach team articulate key messaging points for talking about your congregation and facilities with a wide range of neighbors, leaders and stakeholders. This activity is meant to be conducted with clergy and lay leaders who have a good understanding of your congregation's sense of mission and who are or will be doing outreach to find more space users. Each part of the activity should take about 15 minutes, so budget about an hour for this discussion.

This is not an activity to help you write a new mission statement! This is an activity to help you talk about your church with your neighbors and local stakeholders.

Avoid religious language! We have an amazing vocabulary of faith, but not everyone has the same understanding of those words (or even knows what they mean). Finding different language can unlock creative ways to think and talk about your mission, vision and values.

PART 1 Your Mission

Print out a copy of your mission statement for each participant. Read the statement aloud and use the following questions as a jumping-off point for discussion.

Note: Your church may have an old mission statement that your leaders are not very familiar with or one that everyone agrees needs to be rewritten. In that case, start off by asking each participant to describe their understanding of the congregation's mission.

How does your mission statement make you stand out among different churches in the ELCA? In your community? What is unique about it?

How is your congregation living out its mission today? What programs/activities reflect this mission?

Identify three ways in which your church is living out its mission today, either through an activity your congregation leads, an activity that a community organization leads in your facilities or an initiative that your congregation regularly participates in outside your property (e.g., a soup kitchen). Use action verbs (feeding, supporting, giving, etc.).

PART 2 Your Vision

Your congregation does excellent work, but what are you working toward? What are you hoping for? With your church's mission fresh in your minds, ask participants to describe the change your church hopes to see in your community (local, regional or however you define it). Take no longer than 15 minutes.

What would be different?

Who would feel the change the most? How?

What would be done differently?

What would there be more of? Less of?

Complete this sentence: "We look forward to the day when ..." concluding with your hopes for your community. Think about your community particularly and be specific about the change you hope to see. For example, "when all our town's children have food on their table" instead of "when everyone is fed." You can make this a run-on sentence with two or three vision elements.

We look forward to the day when ...

PART 3 Your Values

Values are the ideals we hold most dear, the ultimate “why” of what we do and how we do it. We can find shared values between people of different religious traditions, political affiliations, nationalities, ages and experiences.

Identify three core values of your church. Looking at the activities that reflect/enhance your mission and your hopes for your community, identify the values that underlie all this work. Remember, don’t fall back on religious language — try to articulate your values in just a couple of words that could resonate with folks who don’t have a faith tradition. You can refer to the extensive (but by no means comprehensive) list of values attached — this can be a good jumping-off point for the conversation.

Value 1: _____

Value 2: _____

Value 3: _____

PART 4 Messaging Mad Libs

Fill in this template with the values, mission-enhancing activities and vision statement your team has articulated.

_____ is committed to _____, _____, _____
(church name) (value 1) (value 2)

and _____. We live out these values through our work and
(value 3)

partnerships: _____, _____ and
(mission activity 1) (mission activity 2)

_____. We look forward to the day when _____.
(mission activity 3) (vision statement)

Once you've put your mission statement together, read it aloud and discuss it as a group. Answer the following questions for further reflection.

What's missing from this message (besides religious language)? What would folks still not know about you?

What questions or ideas are surfacing for you?

How does this message clarify your church's identity and work? How might the community respond to this message?

This is meant to be a starting point for how you message your church to the wider community — your neighbors, partners and advocates. You can always edit and rewrite it. You might choose to add this statement or a version of it to your website or social media page. Members and leaders who are involved in outreach and collaboration with community groups should be familiar with your core values.

Values Worksheet

Based on your church programs, mission partnerships, congregational life and hopes for your neighbors, circle five core values that drive your church. Compare these values with others' to identify three core values for your community.

Accountability	Exploration	Need
Adaptability	Fairness	Openness
Advocacy	Fellowship	Opportunity
Altruism	Freedom	Optimism
Authenticity	Fun	Outrage
Awareness	Generosity	Peace
Balance	Grace	Perseverance
Beauty	Gratitude	Positivity
Belonging	Growth	Power
Boldness	Harmony	Progress
Bravery	Healing	Resourcefulness
Certainty	Heritage	Respect
Change	Honesty	Responsibility
Challenge	Hope	Risk-taking
Charity	Humility	Ritual
Clarity	Humor	Safety
Collaboration	Identity	Self-discipline
Commitment	Imagination	Self-expression
Common sense	Independence	Service
Community	Indignation	Simplicity
Compassion	Initiative	Solidarity
Connection	Integrity	Strength
Continuity	Intention	Struggle
Courage	Intervention	Teamwork
Creativity	Knowledge	Tradition
Curiosity	Joy	Transformation
Dedication	Justice	Trust
Education	Leadership	Truth
Empathy	Learning	Understanding
Empowerment	Love	Urgency
Endurance	Loyalty	Well-being
Excellence	Nature	Wisdom