

PROCESS FOR HOW A CONGREGATION BECOMES A MISSION

(9/10/18)

A Call to Serve:

Missional Congregations in the Diocese of Pennsylvania

“So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:42-45)

Throughout the Episcopal Church the term "Mission Church" holds many meanings. In the Diocese of Pennsylvania, it is best known in reference to the churches that are part of the Diocesan Coalition for Mission and Ministry Program (DCMM for short). Initially designated in the 1980's, these congregations are dedicated to serving the poor and vulnerable and focus their ministries on issues such as education, hunger, addiction and advocacy. The Diocese has supported this program by assisting with expenses related to clergy.

The ministry of this program has not always been thoroughly understood or appreciated. In response to this confusion the Bishop and Diocesan Council convened a special committee to thoroughly examine the program and lay out ways which will allow for greater transparency and more effective support.

Faith tells us that all things are made new in Jesus Christ. While the DCMM program served its congregations well, the needs of the present require that we redefine this program beginning with the name. After more than a year of study and evaluation we are proposing that these congregations no longer be referred to as “missions” but instead as “missional.” This change emphasizes that these congregations are called to a very particular kind of life and ministry.

Missional Congregations are defined primarily by commitment to ministries that promote the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the surrounding community, yet lack the resources to continue to do so on their own. By entering into this program, a congregation is empowered to live more fully into its call to serve the community in the name of Jesus Christ. The ultimate goal of the program is not simply to keep churches open but to lift up and support innovative methods and ministries so that these congregations may proclaim Jesus Christ to our broken and hurting world on behalf of our entire diocese.

The Process

Discerning a call to missional ministry is a complex process that takes months or even years. In many ways this process resembles an entrepreneurial model of a startup business. The congregation that wishes to be considered for this program must be prepared to present ministerial goals and evaluate its potential to achieve them. In order to ensure that worthy opportunities are supported, the applicant congregation will be

supported by members of Council, staff of the Offices of the Diocese, members of the CLRT and others, throughout the process.

1) Identification

A congregation wishing to be considered for Missional Church Status should first complete the Congregational Health and Vitality Assessment. This includes an evaluation of the proposed ministry and the congregation's long-term capacity, including the existing governance, structural and financial resources necessary to live into this call. If after prayerful consideration of the results, the congregation feels called to apply, the Vestry must resolve to proceed. The aspirant congregation should then create a written Ministry Plan detailing their vision and detailing their plan for achieving their ministerial goals. This is the point in the process when a congregation tells their story.

A congregation can also be referred by the Bishop or one of the Canons, the Dean of the congregation's deanery or by the Congregational Life and Redevelopment Team (CLRT).

2) Assessment

Once identified, Diocesan Council will appoint a subcommittee to assess the congregation's gifts and sense of call according to the designated criteria (see Criteria below). The subcommittee will include members of the Diocesan Council, the Dean of the congregation's deanery, the vicar or other member(s) of an existing Missional Congregation, as well as at least one member of the staff of the Offices of the Diocese. Other relevant members (CLRT, etc) can be added as appropriate to the circumstances. Members and staff from the congregation under consideration may not serve on the subcommittee but will work closely with the team to support the assessment. If the congregation is successful in its application then members of this team may become part of the support team (see Support below).

At the conclusion of the assessment, the subcommittee will report its recommendation to both the congregation and to Diocesan Council. The congregation will have the opportunity to address Council at this time. If Diocesan Council determines that the congregation does not meet the criteria, other appropriate recommendations designed to offer support (working with the CLRT, etc.) will be offered.

3) Nomination

If the Council determines that the congregation meets the criteria, Diocesan Council will nominate them to the Bishop.

4) Ratification

If the Bishop concurs with the recommendation, the Bishop will refer the recommendation to the Budget and Finance Committees to advise of the expenses related to a new missional congregation (forecasting those expenses for the next five (5) years, including any cost of living and healthcare increases) to be factored into the next fiscal year's budget and subsequent budgets for the approved term. The final step is for the recommendation to be brought to Diocesan Convention. The subcommittee and congregation will make a presentation at the Pre-Convention meetings and at Convention itself.

During any step of ratification, additional information may be requested. This may delay the process by weeks, months or, depending on the proximity to Convention, even push the application into the next fiscal year.

If Convention approves, the congregation will then become a missional congregation for five (5) years. (see Term, below)

The Criteria

In addition to completion of the Congregational Health and Vitality Assessment, the congregation must provide parochial reports and budgets for the last five years. The subcommittee shall then use the following criteria.

1) Mission

Does the congregation have a clear sense of call to missional ministry? How is this ministry lived out?

2) Community Need

Is there marked practical, social or spiritual need in the surrounding community? Beyond the congregation, is there another way to meet those needs? How would the community be affected if the congregation were to cease its ministry?

3) Congregational Capacity

Does the congregation have the capacity to live into missional ministry? Is there a mentoring capacity to recruit and equip new leaders to continue and grow the ministry? Do their buildings allow for ministry to be carried out without major renovation? How would an expanded clergy presence better facilitate ministry? If so, does it need to be a fulltime position? Would such designation allow the congregation to grow and develop new resources and support? If so, how? What would the impact be on both the congregation and surrounding community?

4) Proximity/Redundancy

What other Episcopal congregations are nearby? Could nearby congregations expand their ministries to meet the needs of the community around the congregation in question? Could the congregation still carry out its ministry if it were to share a clergy person with a nearby congregation? Would the congregation be able to carry out its ministry if it were to relocate due to building issues or community need?

Term/Evaluation

Term

A congregation will be designated a missional congregation for a term of five (5) years. Upon entering the fourth year the congregation shall again be fully evaluated by the above process/criteria. If the congregation is again nominated and ratified, including by Convention, the status shall be renewed for a mutually agreed upon period not to exceed five years. Because it is recognized that there may be instances in which a congregation is

fully living into its mission, yet cannot achieve full financial independence, there is no limit to the number of times this status may be renewed.

Congregations that are currently part of the DCMM program will be automatically approved for a five (5) year term but are expected to fully participate as a Missional Congregation.

Evaluation

A crucial part of accepting a call to participate in the program is a commitment to accountability and transparency. Each year the congregation shall set goals for its ministry (sacred encounters), spiritual growth (worship, formation, etc) and financial sustainability. The report will be used to measure how the Missional Congregation's model for ministry is succeeding against its own goals as well as also setting new goals for the subsequent year. Should these reports show that the goals are not being met, the Bishop, Support Team and Congregation shall work together to determine and implement a solution.

The vicar, appointed by the Bishop to lead the congregation, shall participate in a regular gathering to report back to and receive support from the Bishop and fellow vicars.

In addition, the congregation shall work closely with their support team (see below) and routinely share updates pertaining to goals as well as financial reports. This includes regular reviews of the budget.

On an annual basis the congregation shall make a report back to the Diocesan Council and to Convention detailing its work, impact of its ministries and progress towards its goals. In their evaluation (see Term above) all of these goals and benchmarks shall be considered.

Support

Once a congregation is admitted to the program they shall receive financial support from the Diocese which shall cover the full cost of the vicar, regardless of whether they are full or part time. This shall include salary, benefits, pension, cell phone, mileage and a modest expense account. It does not cover or include any other personnel, programming, equipment, maintenance or improvement. However, the congregation may apply for and receive grants or sources of diocesan aid as determined by the independent bodies that oversee those programs. In addition, each Congregation will work with a support team as designated by the Bishop. The team will be made up of a representative from Diocesan Council, the Dean of their deanery, a member of the Staff of the Offices of the Diocese and other members as may be appropriate to congregational needs. This team shall provide guidance and support in meeting goals and in helping the congregation generate the reporting essential to the program. Finally, the vicar of the congregation shall be considered as a member of the Staff of the Offices of the Diocese. As such they shall receive additional support from regular gatherings of all the vicars, as well as support of the Bishop and Canons in setting and achieving annual goals.

Exiting the program

This program is designed to help congregations live more fully into a call to serve while at the same time growing and becoming increasingly independent. There are several circumstances under which a congregation might cease to participate in the Missional Congregation program.

Financial Independence

If the congregation increases its income to the point where it can independently support its clergy on an ongoing basis while still maintaining all of the costs of ministry and maintenance, it shall leave the program by the end of the calendar year in which independence is achieved. All sources of income including grants, gifts, bequests and other forms of direct aid should be considered in making this determination. This determination will be made by the congregation in consultation with the support team and confirmed by the Canon for Finance.

Congregational Discernment

The congregation may discern that it is no longer called to missional ministry. Such a decision should only be made after a careful period of prayer and in consultation with the support team.

Inability to Meet Goals

If the congregation is unable to meet the goals of ministry (see Evaluation above) for an extended period, status as a missional congregation may not be renewed. In truly exceptional circumstances, status may be withdrawn prior to the conclusion of the five-year term. Such a decision would require the agreement of both the Bishop and Diocesan Council and would only be contemplated after every effort was made by the support team (working in concert with additional members of the Staff of the Offices of the Diocese, the CLRT, etc.), to empower the congregation to achieve its goals.

Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children. (Matthew 14:19-21)

Since their inception our missional congregations have responded to the command Jesus gave to his disciples when he said, "You give them something to eat." While the call to serve the least of these is something all congregations hold in common, missional congregations intentionally make it central to their life and mission. They thus play a critical role in their communities and positively affect the lives of many people every day and model ministry in a way that should inspire us all. Once discerned, such ministries deserve our full support.

The needs of our communities for food, shelter, support and justice might seem beyond the capacity of our resources. But when offered in faith and combined with the gifts of sisters

and brothers in Christ, even the little that we have will be multiplied beyond our wildest imaginations.

This process allows these ministries to evolve while fostering understanding and transparency. We ask for your prayerful support of our missional congregations that they might continue to serve the world in the name of Jesus Christ and on behalf of our entire diocese.

Flow Chart for Mission Process

1) Potential Congregation Identified

- A) Completes Self-Assessment Tool
- B) Prayerfully reflects on results
- C) If a call is discerned then the Congregation proceeds to Assessment

2) Assessment

- A) Congregation referred to Diocesan Council
- B) Council appoints a Subcommittee to work with the Congregation
- C) Subcommittee meets with congregation and determines if they meet the Criteria
- D) Once it has reached a conclusion, the Subcommittee will make a recommendation to Council. The Congregation will have the chance to address Council as part of this process to answer questions or offer alternative perspective.
- E) Council shall make a determination as to whether or not the Congregation should be recommended for the Missional Congregation program.
- F) If Council determines that the Congregation meets the Criteria, the Congregation shall nominate the Congregation to the Bishop
- G) If Council determines that the Congregation does not meet the Criteria, the Council shall work with the Congregation to identify appropriate levels of support.

3) Nomination

- A) The Bishop receives the nomination from Council
- B) If the Bishop concurs, the Congregation moves on to the Ratification phase
- C) If the Bishop determines that the Congregation does not meet the Criteria, Council shall work with the Congregation to identify appropriate levels of support.

4) Ratification

- A) The Bishop informs the Budget and Finance Committees to factor the potential costs into the budget.
- B) The Congregation's Candidacy is announced to the Diocese and is presented as part of the Pre-Convention meetings to offer explanation and answer questions
- C) Convention votes as to whether or not to admit the Congregation to the Program
- D) If Convention votes "Yes," the Congregation shall be admitted for a five year term.
- E) If Convention votes "No," the Subcommittee assigned to the Congregation shall work with Council and Staff to identify alternate sources of support.