



Pastoral Transitions
Policy & Guides for Conduction Mission Studies

Commission on Ministry
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I. Overview of the Policy and Guide

This Mission Study Policy and Report Guide is addressed to the Sessions of churches in Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery to help them navigate the period between pastors. It describes the pivotal work of taking a congregation from its past into its future through the process of a congregational mission study.

A mission study is a process that a congregation goes through to seek to discern how God would have that church to be and to act in the future. It is led by a team of the Session. The process will result in a report written by the Mission Study Team that is first presented to the Congregation for adjustments, then to the Session for approval, and finally to the Commission on Ministry (COM) for review.

Prior to undertaking a search for any pastoral leadership (pastor, co-pastor, associate pastor, or commissioned pastor), a congregation will undertake an assessment of its strengths, history, resources, and vision for future ministry. COM will receive and review this assessment prior to authorizing a search for a pastoral leadership.

A mission study is tailored to unique needs of each congregation. Most congregations will find it useful to engage in a thorough discernment of mission potential as suggested by this guide. Some congregations, particularly those with limited resources, may find a more informal study sufficient. COM can advise congregations regarding the scope of study which best suits the congregation.

Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery is blessed to be comprised of a wide variety of sizes and types of congregations, and it would be impossible to write a definitive guide to congregational mission studies that would fit every need and situation. You may tailor, replace, or add activities as your situation demands.

The mission study, well-done, permits the congregation to examine itself and its action in light of scripture and prayerfully ask God's guidance as they seek the work that God asks of the congregation at this time and place.

Based on the ministry needs identified in the assessment, the congregation/session and COM will work together in discerning the sort of pastoral leadership the congregation requires (pastor, co-pastor, associate pastor, or commissioned pastor).

II. Overview of the Mission Study Process

The mission study is an opportunity to listen to the congregation and surrounding community in discerning strengths for ministry. The study involves gathering data and information about the church. It is broadly framed by these three questions:

1. *Where have we been? (Our history,)*
2. *Where are we now? (Our current realities.)*
3. *Where do we believe God is calling us? (A sense of our vision for the future.)*

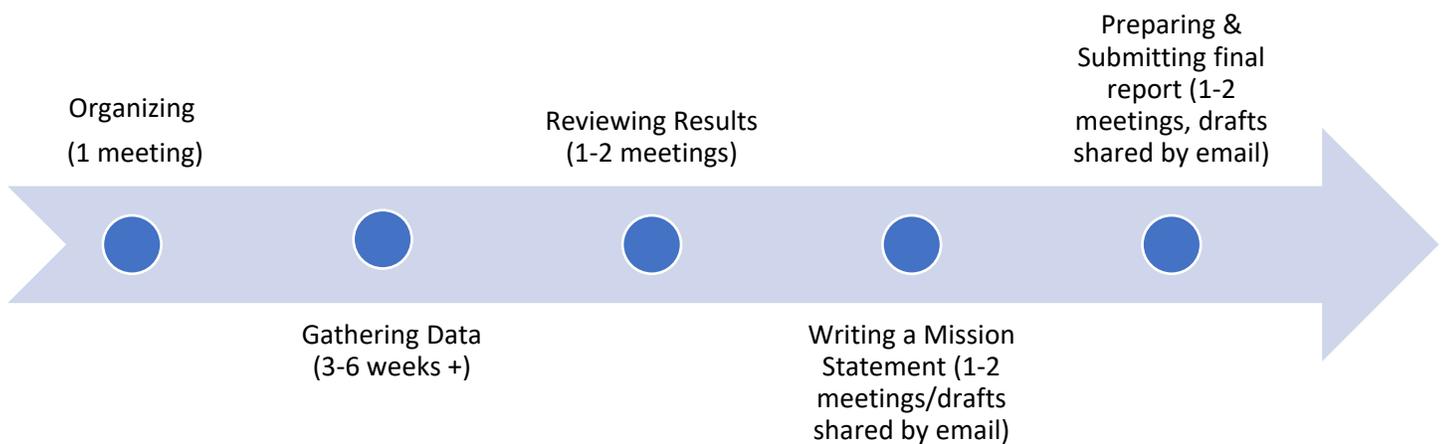
Since every congregation has different needs, the scope and length of mission studies will vary from church to church. In addition, your congregation's particular needs and resources will dictate the exact process you will use. A description of the process used, and data gathered should be included in the final report.

The study process will include time for congregational reflection, gathering and analyzing data, and envisioning the future of the congregation and its ministries. Generally, there are eight recommended steps as outlined below.

Each congregation will need to consider the best methods and timelines for gathering this data. A thorough mission study could take from 3-5 months to complete. The final report should be presented to the congregation, approved by the Session, and forwarded to the COM for its review.

A timeline for the most thorough-going mission study would follow a schedule like what is diagrammed below.

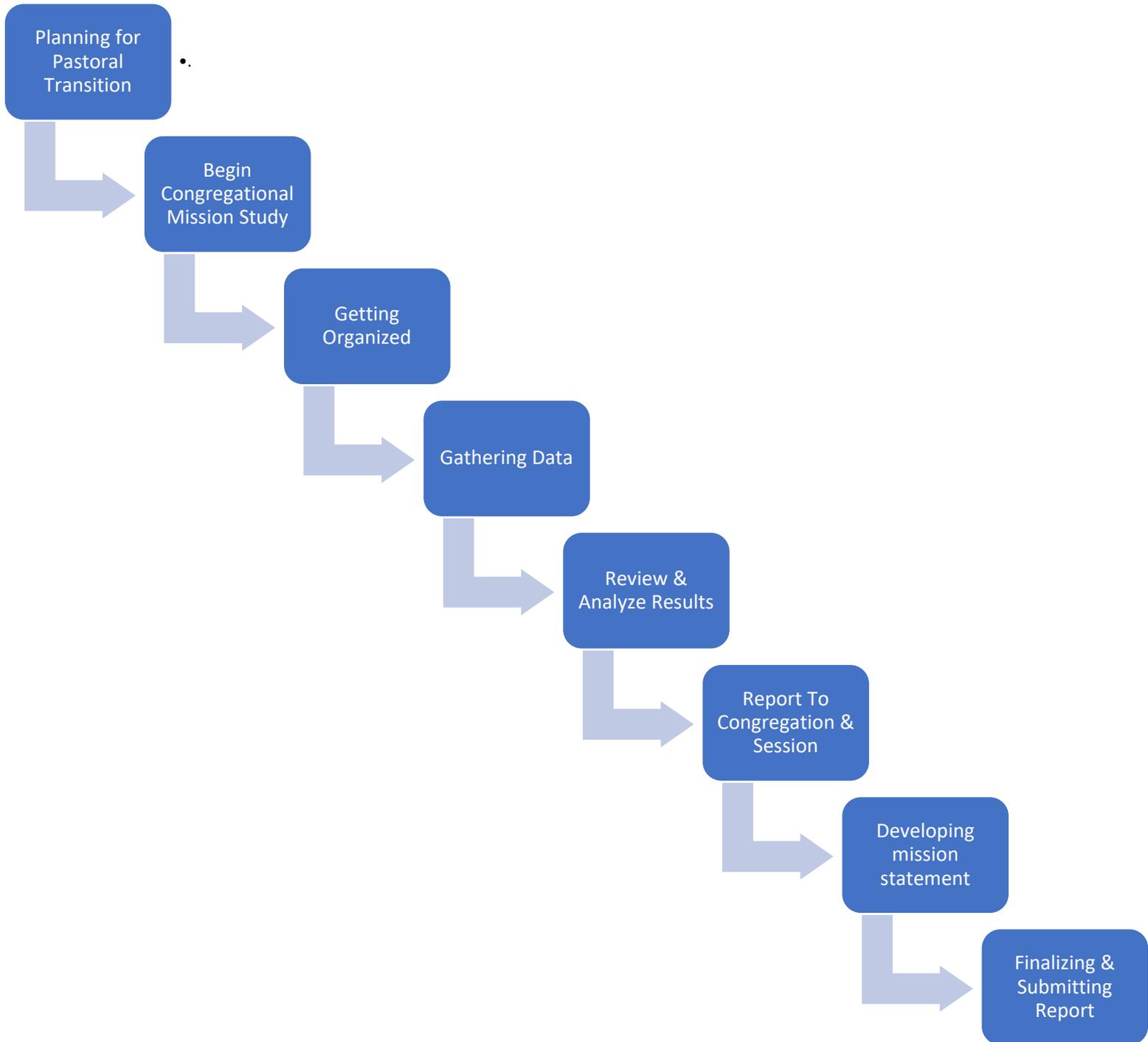
A Potential Timeline



An Eight Step Process

- Planning for Pastoral Transition
 - COM meets with Session shortly before/after departure of pastor.
- Begin Congregational Mission Study
 - Begins after departure of pastor.
 - Session appoints team to design and lead mission study.
 - COM partner consulted as needed.
- Getting Organized
- Gathering Data
 - Demographic study
 - Community study
 - Congregational study
 - Congregational gatherings
 - Financial reports
- Reviewing and Analyzing Results
- Reporting Data
 - Written report prepared by committee.
 - Report presented to congregation and approved by Session.
 - Session implements changes recommended by the congregation.
- Developing a Mission Statement
- Finalizing and Submitting the Report to COM
 - COM reviews report and may offer suggestions.

The Steps Illustrated



II. Overview of Responsibilities – Congregation, Session, Presbytery

As presbyteries work with congregations during their search for a new pastor, the goal is to assist them in making the best match possible. Making a good match begins with having a clear picture of who the congregation is and who God is calling it to become. Presbyteries take a variety of approaches to what is often called a ‘mission study.’ (“On Calling a Pastor,” Presbyterian Church, (U.S.A.) Church Leadership Connection and Office of the General Assembly.)

According to Presbyterian polity, there are distinct responsibilities for the congregation, session, and presbytery during the transition between pastors.

Following the departure of a pastor, co-pastor, associate pastor or a commissioned pastor, COM will advise the Session on the next steps. The mission study is conducted prior to a new pastor receiving a call. For smaller churches, this study can begin not too long after the pastor leaves. For larger churches, this study can be conducted either before or after an interim pastor is called. Typically, however, larger congregations wait until the arrival of an interim pastor who can assist in conducting the study.

- ***The Congregation:*** The congregation’s responsibility is to participate faithfully in the mission study, and to pray regularly for those leading the congregation. During this time, the congregation may choose to study the basics of Presbyterian polity as outlined in the Book of Order.
- ***The Session:*** The Session is responsible for appointing the mission study team/task force, naming a moderator, and providing necessary funding and resource support, and for maintaining open communication with COM. The team appointed by Session should be inclusive of the diversity of the congregation in terms of race, ethnicity, age, sex, disability, geography, or theological conviction (See F01.0403 in the *Book of Order*).

Team members should have diverse experiences within the life of the church, and should:

- Be comfortable facilitating congregational discussions,
- Be comfortable researching community demographics,
- Have access to the congregation’s financial data, and
- Have a basic understanding of any factors which may have contributed to the departure of the previous pastor(s) and a general awareness of the church’s ministries, and
- Be open to the Holy Spirit’s leading as information is gathered and ideas shared.

It can be helpful if at least one of the persons appointed has skills in writing documents. It is also helpful to have one person who might have the skills and availability necessary to serve on the Pastor Nominating Committee, or for smaller churches, a session appointed committee to search for a pastor. The mission study will provide essential information for the completion of the Ministry Information Form that the PNC will use in the search.

As there may be expenses involved in gathering the data and producing the report, the Session should provide a budget for the team. Unless an outside consultant is hired, the costs of a mission study are generally minimal (books, printing, etc.).

- ***The Presbytery:*** COM, on behalf of Presbytery, is responsible for: appointing a partner to the congregation for the transition period, providing orientation to the transition process, remaining in contact with the Session and ensuring Presbytery polity and processes are followed. Presbytery acts as a partner as a congregation discerns its mission and shall support the congregation and Session with prayer and resources. COM assists in discerning leadership options and is available to address questions or any obstacles that may arise. The COM will review the church's mission study, accept it and/or suggest edits.

IV. Basics of a Mission Study

From our Reformed tradition, we believe that when we gather prayerfully, listen to God's word, and listen to each other, God's purpose will emerge from our sharing and seeking to be faithful. Recollections of the history of the congregation are important because they remind us that we exist within a context. That context includes who we have been, and what we have done. We celebrate our achievements and learn from past missteps as we envision the New Beginning we face.

What is a “mission study?”

A congregational mission study is an intentional process of discerning a church's future possibilities for ministry. A mission study is conducted during pastoral vacancies, or to help a congregation assess future directions. It is also useful for discerning staffing needs, ministry opportunities, and congregational planning.

Why is a mission study required during transitions between pastors?

Mission studies are required by the Presbytery during pastoral transitions to foster congregational health and clarify its identity, mission, and purpose. Though mission studies are useful as part of a congregation's ongoing planning processes, the transition between pastors offers a time for congregational self-study. The results of the study will inform the selection of leadership options, including calling a full-time installed pastor or commissioned pastor or part-time pastor.

The challenge of transitions in ministry are also moments of opportunity. A mission study can identify new opportunities and renewed vision. Sessions can use the information gleaned from a mission study to lead the congregation. The Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC)/session (if the church chooses to call a Commissioned Pastor) will use the information to inform its search for a new pastor.

What does the mission study entail?

The mission study involves discerning the spiritual health and mission potential of your congregation. It is generally led by a committee of the Session but will involve the participation of the entire congregation.

A constructive study will be framed around three questions, as suggested by the book *Holy Conversations*:

- *Who are we? (Our historical identity)*
- *Where are we? (Our current context)*
- *Where do we believe God is calling us? (Our vision and mission.)*

These questions can be used by congregations of any size. The study involves gathering data about the history, finances, membership demographics, community demographics, as well as a review of the church's ministry activities and perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and the development of a mission statement.

What will COM look for as it reviews the study?

- A process that engaged the congregation in dialogue about its past, present, and future ministry opportunities.
- A brief narrative about the congregation's history and accurate membership and worship attendance data.
- A review of any recent conflict, trauma or significant changes within the church (including the retirement of a pastor). Naming conflict is an essential step to understanding the current climate for ministry.
- A reflection on the demographics of your congregation's neighborhood context, including an awareness of the racial composition of the church and neighborhood.
- A review of the congregation's core activities, mission, and programs. What is working well? Where are opportunities for growth?
- A summary assessment of the church's physical plant, grounds, and manse (if applicable). Note any recent improvements as well as any deferred maintenance issues.
- A summary of the church's financial situation indicating the congregation's ability to support the sort of pastoral leadership it believes it needs to fulfill its hopes and dreams. Include information from the most recent stewardship campaign, including an annual budget, recent balance sheet, investment balances, debt, and number of pledges.
- A concluding summary of the outcomes, recommendations, action steps, and hopes and dreams for the next chapter of ministry. What challenges are you facing? What sort of pastoral leadership is best for this congregation?
- A mission statement that flows from the outcomes.

How does the study connect to the work of the PNC?

It will be helpful for the mission study to answer the five narrative questions from the Ministry Information Form (MIF). Providing answers to these questions will be enormously helpful to the Pastor Nominating Committee/Session appointed search committee when it writes the MIF. When a church determines it is appropriate to search for a Commissioned Pastor, it is important to complete, although not required, the MIF to clarify the kind of pastor they are looking for and they can give candidates the MIF for informational purposes.

These questions are:

1. What is the congregation's or organization's vision for ministry? Additionally, describe how this vision is lived out.
2. How do you feel called to reach out to address the emerging needs of your community or constituency?
3. How will this position help you to reach your vision and mission goals?
4. Provide a description of the characteristics needed by the person who is open to being called to this congregation and/or organization.
5. For what specific tasks, assignments, and program areas will this person have responsibility?

How do we report the results?

After gathering the essential data, the team will prepare and submit a mission study report to the Presbytery's Commission on Ministry (COM) for review and comment. A congregation must formally receive mission study before a congregation may proceed with a pastoral search.

Your interim pastor, COM partner or presbytery staff member can be useful resources. This guide contains a list of resources and books which may be helpful. This guide is intended to help you as you undertake these tasks, though you may tailor your study to fit your congregation's unique context.

What are our options for pastoral leadership?

- The types of pastoral positions available in our presbytery are ***pastor, co-pastor, associate pastor, or commissioned pastor***. (See section IX, "Definitions.")
- In addition, pastoral relationships may either be "***installed***" or "***temporary***." Installed pastors typically serve indefinitely. However, presbytery may authorize a "designated" term in consultation with the congregation.
- ***Commissioned Pastors*** serve for a three-year term and the term may be renewed. The presbytery commissions the pastor, and the pastor serves under the authority of Session.
- ***Temporary relationships*** are pastoral relationship established by the Session with the concurrence of presbytery and include interim pastors, supply pastors, or ruling elders. These positions are renewed with presbytery permission.

* **Note:** *COM can assist you in identifying the leadership options best suited for your mission.*

V. Congregational Input Sessions

Congregational input is essential. All church members should have the opportunity to participate in reflecting on the past, present, and future of the church. Be sure to carefully plan congregational input sessions to allow for broad participation.

There is no one size fits all approach to gathering congregational input. Choose a process that works best for your congregation and that includes as many church members as possible.

Examples and Processes

A smaller membership church in our Presbytery recently devoted an entire Sunday, including worship and education time, to reflect on “who we are” and “who we are called to be.” Other congregations have found it helpful to conduct three meetings on the past, present, and future. Each of the meetings is about two hours long and could include a meal. These include time for Bible study and either small group or large group conversations around specific questions. A larger congregation engaged a professional consultant to conduct a congregational needs assessment.

Other options could include a weekend retreat, interviews with a cross section of church members, or a congregational survey.

Essential Practices for Gatherings

No matter what process is used, the following practices will be essential for your congregational gathering(s).

- Prayer.
- Group buildings.
- Scriptural foundations of mission and time for faith sharing.
- Recollections of congregational history.
- Receiving the various reports of community study and congregational survey.
- Receiving the demographic study.
- Receiving the financial reports, including a realistic assessment of the congregation’s financial potential, and pressing needs.
- Assessment of the gifts of the congregation.
- Assessment of the needs of the congregation and community.
- Design of the mission statement and its related goals and objectives.

Possible methods For Organizing Congregational Gatherings

Large Congregations:

1. **One-Design:** This design assumes gathering the whole congregation and using breakout groups. It usually involves a total of three to five separate sessions of two and a half hour lengths. They are spaced over periods of five to eight months. There can be a mix of in-person or online (Zoom, etc.) groups. The method is presented with preassigned agendas.
2. **In-Home One Design:** Like the One-Design method except that the gatherings are in homes which select their own meeting schedules. At the close of all the specified gatherings, the entire congregation meets to assimilate the results from each home group and then develops the content to be in the Mission study report.
3. **Weekend Retreat/Conference:** Similar structuring but without the lengthy (several months) time frame.

Smaller Congregations:

1. **One Day Gatherings:** A self-study day consisting of four periods of study and discernment and a worship time with lunch provided. All members of the congregation are requested to be present. Usually scheduled for a Saturday (with childcare provided if needed).
2. **Congregation Vision Day:** Similar format as the preceding method, except here the self-study is guided by a set of questions to be answered in the process of the study. The questions are designed to fit with the Ministry Information Form.
3. **Faithful Listening:** A method that can be completed in two to three weeks. The process takes place on Sundays as part of the worship services. Participants are commissioned and given packets of questions to reflect on during the week. After the service, they gather to consider the three to five questions they were assigned. Another group formalizes the statements into written form. When all the working services are completed, a team assembles the written sets of statements into their mission study report.
4. **Community Needs Assessment:** This method is suggested as useful for very small congregations and possibly rural congregations. It consists basically of assessments of the strengths of the congregation. The responses to the questions may be either written or via personal interviews. They are then collected into a form of a report and submitted to COM.

**Note: More complete descriptions of all these processes are available from COM or Presbytery staff. Also available are mission study reports conducted by various congregations within the Presbytery.*

VII. Outcomes and Mission Statements

Once all the data is gathered, the committee will meet to discuss the responses, organize the results, and write the mission statement and final report. Outcomes can include goals for the congregation, recommendations, and a statement of the church's mission.

As it analyzes the data, the committee may find it helpful to once again review the three questions named earlier ("Where have we been? Where are we now? Where do we believe God is calling us?").

In reviewing the data, the team can begin to look for recurring themes and ideas. Become curious about these themes and emerging ideas, and ask questions such as, "What is this telling us about our congregation's strengths and capabilities? What is happening in the community that was unknown to us? How have we dealt with change in the past?" and "What changes can be made immediately, and what will require more time?"

Paying attention to the financial and fiscal realities facing the congregation will also play a role in making decisions about the type of leadership required. By looking at the Presbytery's minimum salary guidelines and cost of participation in the Board of Pensions (required for installed positions), a congregation can assess the sort of leadership it can afford.

COM can be helpful in discussing the differences between pastors and commissioned pastors and the pastoral position most helpful in fulfilling the congregation's mission.

Based on these discussions, the committee can begin drafting the mission statement. It functions as a pathway toward the future you believe God is calling the church to be. A good mission statement is concise and easily remembered by the congregation. In her book *The Path*, Laurie Beth Jones (1998) says that a good mission statement should be no more than one sentence long, able to be recited by memory, and easily understood by a 12-year-old youth. It is a statement of what the church plans to do.

VIII. Format of the Final Written Report

The final written report should be approved by the Session, made available to the congregation, and submitted to the COM.

It is helpful to include a table of contents for the report. One way of organizing report would be to follow the three questions that have guided the team's research.

Include a brief historical statement, membership statistics/demographics, information about the community the church serves, a review of the congregational input sessions, financial data, outcomes/recommendations, and the evidence to support the proposed mission statement. The report should indicate how the congregation compares to the racial ethnic/cultural or socio-economic composition of its neighborhood or ministry context.

The report should be presented to the congregation, approved by the Session, and forwarded to the COM. Following its receipt and review of the report, COM will either accept it or offer suggestions for clarification.

As it completes its work, the committee should celebrate! A mission study is a detailed but important process for congregational vitality.

IX. Definitions

Pastor - Ministers of the Word and Sacrament (also called teaching elders) shall in all things be committed to teaching the faith in word and deed and equipping the saints for the work of ministry. Ministers of Word and Sacrament hold a theological degree. They are called and installed.

Co-pastor – When a church has two pastors with equal authority.

Associate pastor – A pastor called to a church that already has a pastor. The Associate pastor usually has specific duties as outlined in their call and works in conjunction with the Pastor.

Commissioned pastor – A Commissioned Pastor is a ruling elder who has been trained in pastoral leadership. The Presbytery, in its commission, may authorize a ruling elder to moderate the session of the congregation to which he or she is commissioned, to administer the Sacraments, and to officiate at marriages where permitted by state law. This commission shall also specify the term of service, which shall not exceed three years but shall be renewable. The presbytery shall review the commission at least annually. The Commissioned Pastor is accountable to the Session rather than the Congregation.

Installed pastor - The installed pastoral relationships are pastor, co-pastor, and associate pastor. A minister of the Word and Sacrament may be installed in a pastoral relationship for an indefinite period or for a designated term determined by the presbytery in consultation with the congregation and specified in the call.

Interim pastor – A pastor who serves a church following the loss of a pastoral leader. This person is specially trained to interim work which includes developing a mission study. Interim pastors typically serve in medium to large churches and are not installed or called.

Temporary pastor - Temporary pastoral relationships are approved by the presbytery and do not carry a formal call or installation. When a congregation does not have a pastor, or while the pastor is unable to perform her or his duties, the session, with the approval of presbytery, may obtain the services of a minister of the Word and Sacrament, candidate, or ruling elder in a temporary pastoral relationship. No formal call shall be issued, and no formal installation shall take place. Titles and terms of service for temporary relationships shall be determined by the presbytery. A person serving in a temporary pastoral relationship is invited for a specified period not to exceed twelve months in length, which is renewable with the approval of the presbytery.

X. Books, articles, websites, video

*Note: websites were current and available as of August 2021.

Books/Articles

- Beaumont, Susan. *How To Lead When You Don't Know Where You Are Going*. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019). Beaumont is a former Alban consultant. This book addresses concepts of spiritual leadership for churches and leaders.
- Gray, Joan S. *Sailboat Church: Helping Your Church Rethink its Mission and Practice*. (Westminster/John Knox Press, 2014).
- Gray, Joan S. *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers* (Geneva Press, 2009). Joan Gray is a former General Assembly moderator. Both books offer practical insights into church leadership and mission.
- Jones, Laurie Beth. *The Path*. (Hyperion, 1998). A helpful guide to writing mission statements.
- Minatrea, Milfred. *Shaped By God's Heart: The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches* (John Wiley & Sons, 2004). Helpful in defining the "missional church." Is written from a Baptist perspective but is easily adapted. Includes practices for retooling congregations for mission, including an assessment tool to evaluate a congregation's position between maintenance and mission.
- Oswald, Roy and Robert Friedrich, Jr. *Discerning Your Congregation's Future* (Alban, 1996). This book is somewhat dated but includes numerous exercises for discerning the future and can be used in companion to the Parsons/Leas book mentioned below.
- Parsons, George, and Speed B. Leas. *Understanding Your Congregation As A System* (Alban, 1993).
- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *The Book of Order*
- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *On Calling A Pastor* (available for download at https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/clc/pdfs/the_revised_on_calling_a_pastor_manual_march_2015.pdf)
- Rendle, Gil and Alice Mann, *Holy Conversations* (Alban, 2003). Helpful perspectives on conducting congregational planning.

- Rendle, Gil. *Leading Change in the Congregation* (Alban, 2001).
- Rendle, Gil. *Quietly Courageous: Leading the Church in a Changing World*. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019). An updated overview of Rendle’s perspectives of congregational leadership.
- Robinson, Anthony B. *Changing the Conversation: a Third Way for Congregations*. (Eerdmans, 2008). Includes helpful suggestions for mission studies.
- Steinke, Peter. *Healthy Congregations* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014). A good introduction to thinking about congregations from a systems perspective.

Websites

- MissionInsight (<https://missioninsite.com/>) – A source for gathering insights and information about your church’s community.
- Percept Demographics (www.perceptgroup.com) A faith-based demographical research firm.
- Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy (www.glpby.org) – Check this for useful statistics, forms, and information about the Presbytery.
- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Research Services (<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/research-services/>)
- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Vital Congregations: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/theology-formation-and-evangelism/vital-congregations/> Downloads and information about the PCUSA’s Vital Congregation’s initiative.
- U.S. Census Data - (<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>).

Video:

- Presbyterian Church, (U.S.A.), “On Calling A Pastor: Mission Studies.” https://oga.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/multimedia/on_calling_a_pastor/mission_studies.mp4