

Discipleship Mutual Ministry Review

Prayer: O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you, bring the nations into your fold, pour out your Spirit upon all flesh, and hasten the coming of your kingdom; and grant that in our vocation and ministry we may truly and devoutly serve you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

I. Discerning Vocation

Our most important role as leaders of a church community is discerning the vocation of this congregation (who God is calling us to be) and choosing the paths we might take to grow in that vocation.

So in our time today we want to think about the vocation of this community and begin to answer two questions: Who is God calling this congregation to be? And how is this congregation going to respond to that call? Answering these questions is important because this congregation can only know its true identity by knowing what it is called by God to be and to do. God made us and he calls us to be true to whom he made us to be. If we know our true purpose from God, we can more easily decide which paths we are called to take on our spiritual journey. We can clearly say who this congregation is, who this congregation is becoming, and who might find a wonderful church home in this congregation. We want this congregation to *become* what God is *calling* this church is to be.

The challenge is discovering whom God is calling this community to be. There are some things to keep in mind as we continue this process today:

1. Discernment is ongoing. It can't fully happen in just a few hours. It's often harder to discern our identity in community than individually. We have responsibility for more people. We have a broad spectrum of gifts to open and use in the body of Christ. We need time to reflect on and pray about what we talk about. We need more time to listen to each other and share. Discernment in a church community is different from a corporate strategic planning session because it involves more listening than evaluating and deciding.
2. Discernment requires each of your involvement. It will depend on everyone's participation because we don't know how the Spirit will work. Your thought might not seem important to you but it may be a key expression of what God wants us to hear.
3. We cannot simply measure ourselves against some third party objective standard of what a church should be. To respond to God's calling in the world, we need to identify and evaluate our peculiar circumstances: Where are we? Who are we? What is our current reality? Who are the people, communities or areas this congregation is called to serve. From this, we may understand a more specific vision of where God is calling us. Then we can develop a strategy for how we get there.

4. It's important that we are ever aware that, in God's love for us, God allows us to choose for ourselves and that we want to make choices that support the mission of the Church. Discernment will just show us possibilities from which we may choose. The importance of the process is becoming aware of possibilities before making choices.

These challenges of discernment may be frustrating, but we need to try to avoid the temptation to jump directly to a discussion of strategies (or what we want to do next). If we talk too early about strategy, we can rule out possibilities for ourselves too early. We can also keep ourselves from doing things we'd like to do by assuming they'd be too hard to do. I don't know where our discussions will lead. That's up to you and the Holy Spirit. I can assure you that we will gradually have a clearer conception of goals and strategies. But it will take some patience. We need to give it time and let the Holy Spirit lead us where we need to go.

I don't have a plan for that and that's a good thing; but we'll apply a couple of tools to help us in the discernment process: a Church Discipleship Model, and an Organic Mutual Ministry Review. Let's begin the MMR process with some scripture readings. . . . [Provide but don't review the Mutual Ministry Review Summary:]

What is a Mutual Ministry Review (MMR)?

A mutual ministry review is a discernment process in which the leaders of the congregation ask: Who is God calling this congregation to be? How is this congregation presently responding to God's call? And how is this congregation going to respond to God's call? The MMR is an effort to discern God's will for the church and call for all ministers (lay and clergy) to be accountable for it.

Why conduct a Mutual Ministry Review?

A mutual ministry review offers opportunities (i) for the clergy, the vestry and the parish community to assess how effectively they are fulfilling their responsibilities to each other and their ministries, (ii) to celebrate the ministries of the congregation, (iii) to identify areas for growth and development, and (iv) to identify ways to enhance the various ministries of the church and all its people.

A complete Mutual Ministry Review Process will provide:

- An effective *evaluation* of what is going well and what needs attention (especially in terms of how well we are living our Baptismal Covenant and becoming disciples);
- A shared *vision* of where God is calling the congregation; and
- A *strategy* that produces clear priorities and objectives for the congregation, specific goals for achieving them, and an understanding of the shared expectations, formation, leadership and resources needed to accomplish them.

What is the theological basis for Mutual Ministry Review?

The church can become the body of Christ in the world if we “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 4:15-16). For the church to become more of the body of Christ, each person needs to bring and use their special gifts in the community (1 Corinthians 12). Because all of the members of the body are interconnected, the work of the body is “mutual ministry” and we share responsibility to observe and review our ministries within our commitment to follow Christ and be God’s people.

A mutual ministry review helps us to be accountable to God for our actions, a stewardship responsibility portrayed in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25). Most importantly, a mutual ministry review enables us to share and witness to the activity of God in our lives and community, as when the seventy disciples returned to proclaim what miracles had happened in God’s name (Luke 10).

II. A Discipleship Model for Mutual Ministry Review

Scripture Reflection: John 15:1-11

Jesus says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."

Discussion Questions:

What did you hear?

What does it mean to abide in Jesus?

What does it mean to have Jesus abide in us?

What are the critical functions of this church community?

What does it mean to be disciples?

Is discipleship critical to this church? Why?

Compare Romans 11:13-24

Jesus proclaims that we indeed need him as the source of joy and fulfillment in our lives. And yet we can grow within from the vine and be fruitful and be creative and “ask for whatever we wish” if we recognize and abide in God’s love.

One of the specific directives here is “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

This is another agricultural example.

What does it mean to “become my disciple” or “abide in me”?

If the church is about making disciples, how does discipleship happen in a church community? Let’s look at a model.

Theologically, the Bible shows us that discipleship happened by people being introduced to Jesus, living with him and coming to know him and then being sent out to serve.

From living with Jesus, the first followers became believers and then went out and proclaimed the Good News of Jesus themselves. Philip became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah and so he invited Nathanael to “Come and see Jesus.”

This process of “come and see, come to know and come to serve Jesus” is the Christian journey that is encouraged through church communities. The journey is not linear, but circular in an upward spiral. A person may enter the process at any point, perhaps by response to invitation, or coming to learn about Jesus in worship or Sunday school or through serving at a soup kitchen. But once the path is started, it may lead farther. Paul says we go from glory to glory. To the extent this model represents a path of spiritual development, we also need to individually consider how we can continue to develop various aspects of our personalities, to participate in each of the aspects of the spiritual path. We may need to come to Jesus in worship and prayer and offering. We may need to continually come to know Jesus better through Christian formation. And we may need to come to serve more. It’s tempting to focus on one area, but we need to stretch to grow along this spiritual path.

We need to look at each of these processes as entry points and consciously bring people into community with God and one another.

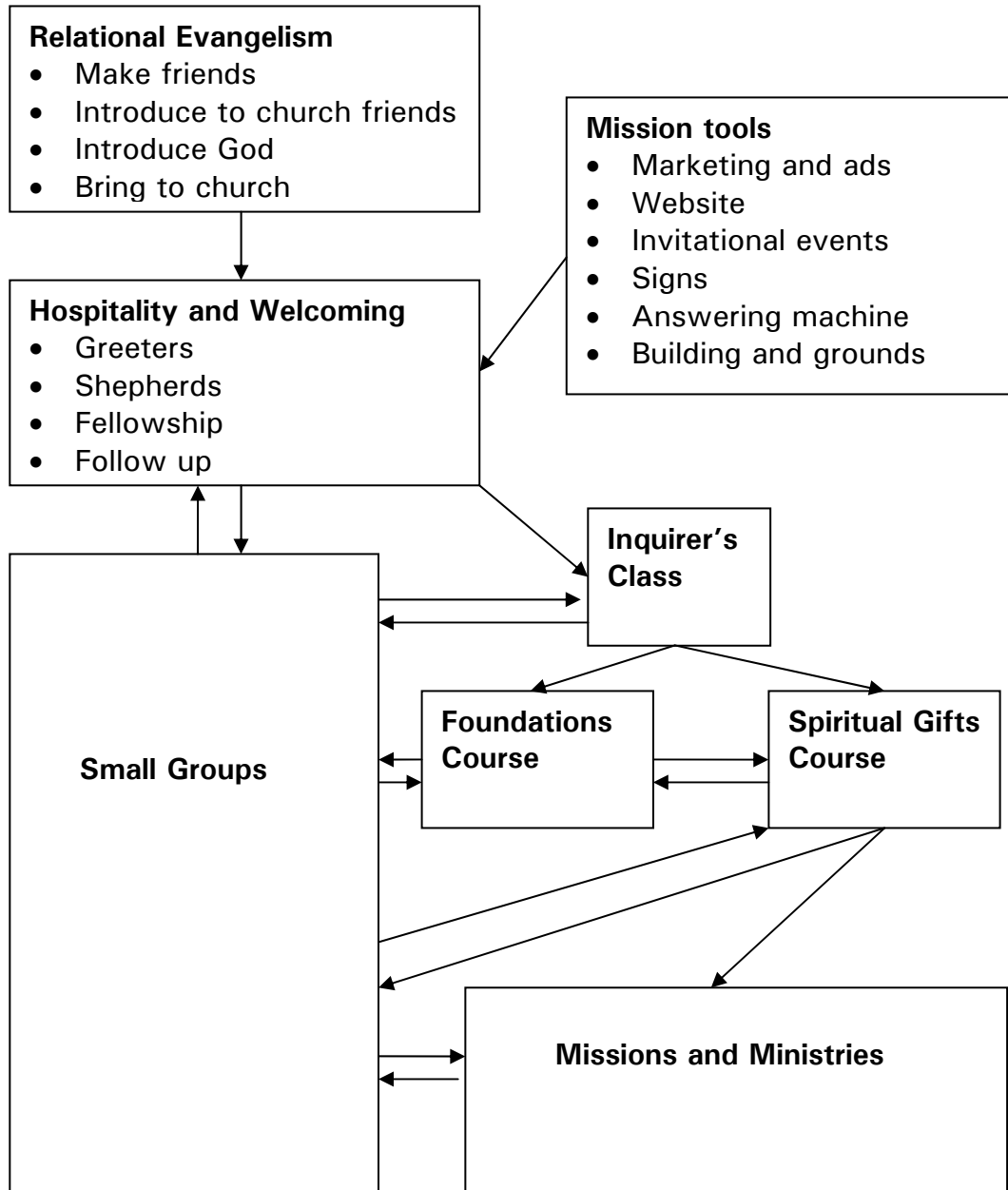
Passionate Christian congregations are focused primarily on helping people meet, know and serve Jesus. The most alive congregations focus continually on becoming disciples and growing into the body of Christ. Individuals in these churches have increased their own awareness of God by being part of bringing people to Jesus and helping each person both recognize Jesus’ presence and live more consciously in that presence. Becoming animated by the Spirit, these are truly communities where people come to see God more clearly, love God more dearly and follow God more nearly day by day. Energy in these communities comes not from solving problems or creating new programs but from discovering or reaffirming that they are (and are becoming) Christians. In most everything they do, these congregations proclaim the true source of their power, the presence of Jesus in their lives.

Why is each step important? How do we do each step at our church? How are we doing with each step in the process? What are the challenges with each step in the process?

Who are the people we serve? Where are the entry points at which we do particularly well? Where are the entry points at which we have particular opportunities? What resources do we have to lead these opportunities (building/financial/leadership/training)? What resources/tools do we need to develop? How do we create/strengthen entry points?

How are we doing with the following model? (Remember that the arrows, or relational support and handoffs, are the important thing, not the programs.) How could we better support a discipleship process in our church? How are we/can we be unique?

A PROCESS OF DISCIPLESHIP IN THE CHURCH



COME AND SEE JESUS ❖ COME TO KNOW JESUS ❖ COME TO SERVE JESUS

This is only a mechanical process unless it is focused on loving God and loving one another (Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27) and bringing others to Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8). The most important parts of this diagram are the arrows, which represent how we stay relationally connected and make handoffs among people and groups. "Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds [and encourage] one another" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

III. Goal Starters

The governing board needs to set detailed goals for the congregation. Some goals will come from fully answering the following questions:

What does God seem to be calling the congregation to do at this time? (It may be that the ministry of the past few years is affirmed and continued. It is also possible that while the former direction of ministry is affirmed, the congregation will recognize that new challenges call for new resources.)

What resources do we bring to the mission of the church in these areas and what resources do we need to bring?

What outside resources do we need (skills, networks for sharing, consultants, workshops, training, funding, support)?

What are the main goals of the church?

When will they be accomplished?

Who is responsible for accomplishing these goals?

Once goals are defined, we need to create action plans and follow up on them. The easiest way is to create a table with columns for the goal, the particular action step, who is responsible for the action step, the time for achieving the action step and the current status of the project. The vestry needs to review project status and priorities regularly.

What are the main goals of the congregation?

When will they be accomplished?

Who is responsible for accomplishing these goals?

Once goals and action plans are defined they must be shared with and affirmed by the broader congregation. Leaders need to regularly communicate about progress toward the goals or the reprioritization or addition of goals. In most cases, there will need to be ministry teams to support and carry out the goals.

How are we going to test and strengthen our self-identity within the broader church community?

What are ways to share this vision and gather further input (i.e., congregational survey with focus groups or follow up visits by leaders or larger church gathering)?

How will the congregation formally adopt this vision (so it is celebrated, communicated, published and proclaimed frequently so that all church members can share in this identity)?

Conclusion

Eugene Peterson paraphrases Paul (I Corinthians 12):

By means of his one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. . . Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain—his Spirit—where we all come to drink . . . I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less. A body isn't just a single part blown up into something huge. It's all the different-but-similar parts arranged and functioning together. . . What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own . . . The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding

our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part . . . the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance. You are Christ's body—that's who you are! You must never forget this.