

Organic Mutual Ministry Review

Prayer: Almighty and everliving God, source of all wisdom and understanding, be present with those who take counsel for the renewal and mission of your Church. Teach us in all things to seek first your honor and glory. Guide us to perceive what is right, and grant us both the courage to pursue it and the grace to accomplish it; through Jesus Christ our Lord. 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. An Organic Model for Mutual Ministry Review

Scripture Lessons

Mark 4:26-32

Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

Luke 13:6-9

Then Jesus told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Matthew 7:16-20

You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.

Isaiah 5:1-4, 7a

Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.

What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? . . . For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting.

Questions:

What did you hear?

What do these passages say about where our growth comes from?

What do we need to do to grow?

What are the critical functions of this church community?

Are our actions producing fruit for the kingdom of God? We're measuring results and removing, pruning and cultivating.

The Bible often uses metaphors of fruit and vineyards to describe the people of God and the work to which we are called. Caring for a church, like caring for a vineyard, requires hard work. We labor in the vineyard with God and we plant and water but God gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6). To bear good fruit, a vineyard needs to be tended over the course of many years. The farming cycle must be repeated: season after season, crops are planted and tended and fruit is gathered and stored. Similarly, year after year, we make plans for our church community, act upon them, and review our activities. The work is never ultimately perfected nor completely finished, and the fruit is not always sweet. Some times pruning is needed or the land needs to lie fallow. Yet when good fruits are gathered, we celebrate and give thanks for the rich harvest. The good fruits of the harvest, as St. Paul describes, are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22).

Ask additional questions:

Do we want/need to grow as a church community?

What do we mean by growth?

How will we grow?

Can we grow without making changes?

What kinds of changes would we need to make to grow?

Describe a worship, formation or outreach activity where you personally felt most touched, excited or transformed? How did it feel? What did you learn? Why was it special? Could this happen at this church?

Use an agricultural model for analysis: This is an opportunity to explore our tree to see: what needs digging and fertilizing (reworking); planting; watering, pruning (tending); what needs to let lie fallow; what we are over tending; what is ready for harvest and festival. List our activities according to where they are in the growth process. (This allows us to evaluate our progress in a positive and nonthreatening way.)

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<p>DIG: What needs digging around and fertilizing (reworking)?</p>	<p>PLANT: What needs to be planted (exploring, starting, leading)?</p>	<p>WATER: What needs watering (tending, over-sight, encouragement)?</p>
<p>NEW SEEDS</p>	<p>LIE FALLOW: What needs to be put on hold for a while?</p>	<p>CELEBRATE: What needs harvesting and/or a harvest fest (celebrating)?</p>
<p>What is being over cultivated?</p>	<p>PRUNE: What needs to be pruned or weeded out (let go of)?</p>	<p>What needs to be placed?</p>

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.