A Guide for Churches

Entering into an

Interim Time

Part 2: Conducting a Congregational Mission Study

The Presbytery of New Hope
This Guide is addressed to the Sessions of churches in New Hope Presbytery to help them navigate the time between installed pastors (better known as the interim period).

The interim period can be a challenging time for congregations, but with solid dedicated leadership from the Session, those challenges can produce growth. Church members are inclined toward uncertainty, concern and frustration during the interim period. When Session members nurture the congregation by leading them through the interim period, those potentially negative experiences can be transformed into hope, vision and possibility. Indeed, some of the strongest spiritual leadership an elder can offer is to help the institutional church that is worried about its future leadership learn to rely ever more firmly on Christ who is head of the church and trust that Christ will nurture the church into its future.

The Committee on Ministry of New Hope Presbytery (COM) has prepared three documents comprising A Guide for Churches Entering an Interim Period. Part one of the Guide describes the often misunderstood and undervalued work of an intentional interim pastor. Part two (this booklet) describes the pivotal work of taking a congregation from its past and into its future through the process of a congregational mission study. Part three of the Guide presents guidelines for calling a pastor nominating committee and conducting a pastoral search.

Perhaps even more than in the other parts of the Guide, the name Guide is a key part of this document’s title. New Hope 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 address every need and concern in the Presbytery. Use this guide as a map for the process of celebrating who you, as a congregation, have been and discovering who you long to become. Tailor, replace or add activities as you see fit!

While COM requires you to go through this process, the process is for your congregation. The goal both in requiring the process and inviting you to make it your own is to help you transform the uncertainty, concern and frustration of the interim period into hope, vision and possibility for your congregation’s future.

One final note of introduction: if you do not yet know the COM member who is your assigned liaison, contact the Presbytery office and find out! We consider our participation on COM to be ministry to congregations as we come alongside the relationship between pastors and churches. We want to help you.
OVERVIEW OF THE INTERIM PERIOD

What is outlined in this document is a suggested procedure for conducting a mission study, a process particularly targeted for congregations that are preparing for a pastor search. We trust, though, that the suggestions may also be helpful to congregations that engage in a mission study outside of such a process. To put this process in context in the case of an “empty pulpit”, the ordinary course of an interim period requires the following steps and involves the presbytery’s Committee on Ministry (COM) throughout:

CALLING AN INTERIM PASTOR
- Who is God calling to help the Session and church to grow, to listen to God’s direction, and to prepare for a new pastor?
- The Session interviews potential interims and discerns who God is calling to lead us.

A TIME FOR HEALING
- Through personal conversations and small group listening/discussion, enable God’s Spirit to bring about healing where there may be hurt

LOOKING AT GOD’S PLAN FOR THIS CHURCH BY DOING A MISSION STUDY
- Who is God calling us to be? How are we to prepare for that?
- Look at our vision, mission, values, goals, strengths, and the needs around us, and discern God’s purpose for this congregation.

ELECTING A PASTOR NOMINATING COMMITTEE (PNC)
- Who is God calling to lead the search for a new pastor?
- Determine what is needed (gifts, skills, commitment, etc.), pray for guidance, and elect the committee in a congregational meeting.
- The Presbytery’s Committee on Ministry will need to approve the election of the PNC.

BUILDING A TEAM AND COMPLETING A CHURCH INFORMATION FORM (CIF)
- The PNC writes the Church Information Form, including the information from the mission study, and has it approved by the Session and the Presbytery’s Committee on Ministry.

SEARCHING FOR A PASTOR
- The PNC reviews Personal Information Forms (PIF) from potential candidates, interviews pastors, discerns who God is calling to be the church’s next pastor, and makes this recommendation to the congregation at a congregational meeting. The pastoral search is A CONFIDENTIAL PROCESS!

CALLING and electing the NEW PASTOR
- The PNC negotiates a tentative call to the pastor and seeks approval by the Presbytery through its Examination Committee and Committee on Ministry.
- Once approvals are in place, the congregation hears the PNC’s report and elects the new pastor.

INSTALLATION OF NEW PASTOR

How long will all this take? Good question! In a business environment such a change in leadership could take only a few weeks. But the church takes longer, and if you review the process outline above you will understand why. If you have questions, please contact COM.

(Thank you to the Rev. Jody Welker for sharing this page)
I. GUIDELINES FOR MISSION STUDIES

Overview

A Mission Study is a process that a congregation goes through to seek discernment about how God would have that church to be and to act in the future. It is led by a committee of Session, often called the Mission Study Team (MST) or Mission Study Committee. The process results in a Mission Study Report (MSR) written by the Mission Study Team that is presented to the Session for approval and to the Committee on Ministry for review. This review is a necessary step before a congregation is allowed to elect a Pastoral Nominating Committee and begin the search for a new pastor. Many people confuse a congregational Mission Study with Long Range Planning or Strategic Planning because both end up with a Vision and a list of Goals and Objectives. There are a number of significant differences, however.

The first and foremost difference is that as a church we always seek to examine ourselves and our actions in the light of scripture and prayerfully to ask God’s guidance as we try to determine the work that God wants us to do in a certain time and place.

Secondly, unlike most corporations, the church is a volunteer organization. The corporate model in which leadership sets direction and tells staff to follow it does not work well in a church. It is important to involve as much of the congregation as possible in the process of self-examination and decision-making. There are two reasons for this. One is that as Reformed Christians we believe both in the priesthood of believers and in the corporate body of the church — that together we are richer and wiser than we are separately. The second is to develop a sense of ownership within the congregation of the new directions for the ministry of that church in the coming years.

For the Congregation and By the Congregation

A well-founded Mission Study includes fact-finding about the congregation and the community in which it ministers. It provides an opportunity for members of the congregation prayerfully to study what scripture says about the church, to learn new information about its community and its needs, to learn who they have been and who they are as a congregation, and to celebrate their gifts as a church. Once this period of learning is complete, then the congregation has the information it needs to begin to design its Vision and develop new Goals and Objectives for its ministry in the coming five years.

The written report that is a product of the congregational Mission Study should describe the process followed for the study, provide all the information discovered during the process about both the community and the church, and present the new Vision, along with Goals and Objectives for living out the Vision. This report will be implemented by the Session as it assigns responsibility to different bodies within the congregation for different tasks.

A Mission Study is very much a process executed and owned by the congregation. However, especially in congregations where a pastor has recently left and that are enjoying the services of an interim pastor, that person should be drawn on as a precious resource. All trained interim pastors should be familiar with the Mission Study process.
COM Review of the MSR

The item “Review of MSR by COM” serves to ensure that the Mission Study has been conducted with full participation of the congregation, provides a fair representation of the congregation, presents a thoughtful Vision, and, importantly, is suitable as a basis for the Church Information Form (CIF). To this end, the MST should deliver the final report to the COM liaison. As mentioned before, COM does not mandate a particular Mission Study process; however, the following sections should be included in the MSR:

- A financial review
- A summary of the demographic study
- The Vision Goals and Objectives statements
- Evidence of congregational bible study as part of the process
- A description of the Mission Study process, including evidence of widespread congregational involvement and a description of the techniques used to bring about congregational excitement.

After their review, COM may or may not return comments and may or may not suggest revisions. In this connection one should bear in mind that the MSR is extremely important for the writing of the CIF; considering that the CIF represents the face of the congregation to prospective pastoral candidates, it is imperative that the MSR be scrutinized very carefully: it may determine the immediate future of the congregation.

Once a congregation knows itself, knows where it wants to go, and has made a serious effort to understand where God wants it to go, it is ready to ask itself what kind of pastor is needed to help make the Vision reality and start a search for that pastor.
II. SUGGESTED PROCESS

The eight steps to the Congregational Mission Study process are:
1. Appoint Committee of Session to Design and Lead Mission Study
2. Demographic Study
3. Community Study
4. Congregational Survey
5. Congregational Gatherings
6. Written Report Done by Committee, Approved by Session and reviewed by COM
7. Report Presented to Congregation
8. Session Implements Recommendations of Report

In this section each step will be briefly defined. In Section III each step will be presented in more detail with references to resources that show other ways to achieve the same task. The liaison appointed by COM will be an important resource in guiding the process.

1. **Appoint Committee of Session to Design & Lead Mission Study**

   The Session begins by assigning a committee or team to lead the congregation through the Mission Study. This Mission Study Committee or Mission Study Team (which shall be referred to as MST for the rest of this document) has the responsibility for designing each step of the Mission Study and then implementing it.

2. **Demographic Study**

   Part of the process of understanding what work God has to do for us in a certain time and place is getting to know the needs of the community to which we minister. As part of the assessment of the community, a demographic study is to be conducted, in order to understand who our neighbors are now and who they probably will be in the coming years.

3. **Community Study**

   Another way of learning about the community to which we minister is to interview community leaders about what they perceive as the needs of the community. This is often an eye-opening experience for the congregation.

4. **Congregational Survey**

   A survey of the congregation, about who they are and what they desire in the church, is an effective tool for getting a decent amount of information from many members and presenting it in a single report. Again, we often think we know what everyone in the church thinks but we rarely ask them and are often surprised by the results when we do.

5. **Congregational Gatherings**

   This is the heart of the Mission Study. The MST will design a way for members of the congregation to gather for 8-12 hours to do the work of the Mission Study.

6. **Final Report Written by Committee, Approved by Session and Reviewed by COM**

   After the Congregational Gatherings, the MST will continue to develop the ideas gathered from the congregation and write the Mission Study Report.
7. Report Presented to Congregation

Once both the Session and COM have reviewed the Mission Study Report, it should be presented to the congregation. Copies of the report should be available to the congregation.

8. Session Implements Recommendations of Report

At the next meeting of the Session after the MSR is reviewed by COM, the Session should begin to decide how to use the Mission Study and how to implement the new Vision with its Goals and Objectives.
IV. COMPONENTS — MORE INFORMATION ON EACH STEP OF THE PROCESS

This guide suggests one way for taking the steps in this process but you may also develop your own approach. There are a number of resources on mission studies (which are listed in the Resources section) that can be used to shape the process of your own mission study. A copy of each of these is available in the Presbytery office. They also can easily be obtained using the ordering information included in the Resources section. As noted earlier, do not hesitate to consult your interim pastor.

1. Appoint a Committee of Session to Design and Lead Mission Study

A well-done mission study involving the whole congregation takes months to prepare and execute. It would be best if a committee or team or task force, whatever you wish to call it, were appointed by the Session to design and implement a mission study process. The size of this group will depend on the size of the church. In a small church as few as three people could do it but a larger congregation might need a team of 6-8 people. The Mission Study Team (MST) should plan to meet weekly until their task is done. If they are not prepared to meet that often, the mission study could take a year or more to finish.

The Session will need to give the MST a budget. The amount of the money will certainly determine what the MST can do and how easy it will be. The budget might be designed to cover the costs of a demographic study, a congregational survey, a consultant to work with the MST, and the congregational gatherings. Again, the amount of money will be needed will depend on the size of the congregation. A minimum of $1000 should be budgeted for the whole process. If a consultant is hired the cost will increase substantially.

The MST should report frequently to the Session. It would also be advisable for the MST to communicate frequently with the Liaison from the Presbytery’s Committee on Ministry for advice and guidance.

2. Demographic Study

A demographic study of the community in which the congregation is placed and to which it ministers can provide valuable information about the needs of that community as well as about how to reach potential new members.

It is possible for the MST to do research on its own to gather US census and school census information but we have an even better resource available to us. Our Presbytery has access to the Research Services through the denominational website (www.pcusa.org).

3. Community Study

An important way to learn about the needs of your community is to contact community leaders.

There are a number of ways to do this. An easy approach is to ask members of your congregation to contact and interview about 15-20 community leaders. A helpful resource is Congregations in Transition (see Resources section).

4. Congregational Survey

You want your mission study to involve as many members of the congregation as possible. There are two reasons for this: you want your mission study to truly reflect your whole congregation and you want your congregation to accept ownership of the study when it is done.
If you do a mission study that does not involve the whole congregation, there is a strong likelihood that the congregation will resist implementing it or react with anger when the Session seeks to implement it. It is possible for a MST to design its own congregational survey.

Or, they could contract with the Hartford Institute for Religion Research (hirr.hartsem.edu) to do the survey for them. This option is spelled out in more detail in the section on Services at the end of this document. Hartford has three types of surveys available. The cost depends on the type of survey chosen and the number of members who fill it out.

5. Congregational Gatherings

This is the heart of the Congregational Mission Study. Everything done up to now has been in preparation for the Congregational Gatherings and everything afterward will be to report the decisions of the congregation in these gatherings. The MST will design a way for members of the congregation to gather for 8-12 hours to do the work of the Mission Study. This time will include at a minimum:

- prayer
- group building
- scripture study and faith sharing
- recollections of the history of the congregation
- receiving the reports of the demographic study
- receiving the reports of the community study and the congregational survey
- an assessment of the gifts of the congregation
- an assessment of the needs of the congregation and the community
- the beginning of a design of a new Vision with related Goals and Objectives

Prayer, scripture study, and faith sharing are all important in setting the tone for these gatherings and for shape of the discussions. Unlike the corporate model of strategic planning, the church’s mission study is about seeking to know what God intends in a particular place and time. You are not deciding what you want to do over the next five years, but what God wants you to do.

Part of our Reformed tradition is that 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 our seeking to be faithful. Recollections of the history of the church are important for us to remember that we exist in a context that includes who we have been and what we have done. We can celebrate our achievements and learn from our mistakes (or the mistakes will repeat themselves).

Hearing the reports from the demographic study, the congregational survey and the community study will set your decision making in the context of who you are today and to whom you are called to minister (your neighbors). After sharing and hearing all this information, the gathering defines what it has heard and what it knows to be the needs of the community and it describes what gifts God has given this congregation to meet those needs.

Finally, the gathering is ready to begin to delineate what it understands God’s Vision for this church to be and what Goals and Objectives must be achieved in order to make this Vision a reality.
All these steps assume a lot of time invested by the congregation. This is critical since it is only by working together that the congregation can develop a Vision with Goals and Objectives that truly reflect the whole congregation’s needs and desires. If the result does not reflect the whole congregation, then there will be little enthusiasm or support for making those ideas become reality. Therefore, the work of the MST must be not only to choose what approach to use in the Congregational Gatherings, but must also be to build wide-spread excitement and commitment to this work within the congregation in order to get as much involvement as possible. The section entitled *Congregational Gatherings – One Design* presents one approach for conducting this vital and central step of the Congregational Mission Study.

6. **Written Report Prepared by Committee, Approved by Session and Reviewed by COM**

The MST must take all the information from the Congregational Gatherings and forge it into a report. This will include, but not be limited to, a synopsis of the demographic, community and congregational surveys, a report from the Session on the financial health of the church and the financial feasibility of the goals and objectives, a brief history of the congregation, a description of the process used in the mission study, and the Vision Statement with its Goals and Objectives as refined by the MST.

Once written, the Mission Study Report must be approved by the Session before being sent to the Committee on Ministry for its review.

7. **Report Presented to Congregation**

Once the Session has approved and COM has reviewed the Mission Study Report, it should be presented to the congregation. This can be done in Sunday morning worship or in a special congregational meeting. Copies of the report should be available to the congregation. If the congregation needs to find a new minister, the Mission Study Report will be a critical document for the Pastor Nominating Committee as it writes the Church Information Form.

8. **Session Implements Recommendations of Report**

It will be the responsibility of the Session to see that the Vision Statement is used in the ministry of the church and that the Goals and Objectives are implemented. This will mean that the Session will need to delegate specific goals or objectives to certain committees or groups in the congregation. It will also mean that the Session will need to hold these groups and committees accountable for doing this work. Asking for quarterly reports on their implementation is a good way to do this.
CONGREGATIONAL GATHERINGS — ONE DESIGN

This design has a small congregation in mind and assumes gathering the whole congregation and using break-out-groups.

Preparation

- Plan your meeting times and places. Try to have the meetings about a week apart so that what is learned and shared will have time to percolate through the congregation.
- Make sure ample notice is given to the congregation, and special attempts are made to invite everyone personally as well as through announcements.
- In order for everyone to have a chance to be involved, childcare arrangements – provided by non-church members – must be made for children of all ages. Consider asking the youth group (and their advisors) from another church and then make a donation to their ministry. Remember — your confirmed youth are members of the church and should be encouraged to participate in the mission study process.
- Identify comfortable rooms to use, with heat or air on and make sure there is no conflict of use of space.
- Make refreshments available — not too heavy or folks will go to sleep! Coffee, tea, water, juices, etc. Perhaps fruit or vegetables for snacking.
- Make sure you have more paper, markers, Bibles, hymnals or song sheets, pencils, tape, etc. than you think you will need. Better to have too much than not enough. Large pieces of newsprint or flip-chart paper is particularly helpful. You may need to order some ahead of time.
- Prepare and copy handouts as indicated in the Session instructions. The content for the handouts is included in the Session instructions; you will need to make your own originals for duplication.
- Allow ample time for presenters to conduct their required research and prepare to present their findings. (Session I: History of the Church, Session II: Demographics, Session III: Community Leaders, Financial Statement and Congregational Survey)
- Arrange not only for leaders for small break-out groups but for recorders (note-takers) as well. Major points shared in every session should be recorded to be used by the MST later in its work.

Points to remember throughout the process

- Do your advance preparation so that you are not running around looking for things during the gathering.
- After you have designed the meeting, be sure to go through each step as it comes. Don’t skip ahead of yourself!
- Give everyone the time to know and understand the information that is gathered. Sometimes groups want to jump right into debating ideas that are sparked before they understand all the material. When it comes time for discussion, make sure they hear each other well enough to understand new ideas before taking off on a new idea.
- Observe the instructions and time allotted. Try to keep everyone on track time-wise.
- Take it easy! This should be a fun experience for you and for the whole congregation. Not only will it be a time of blessing in your church’s faith but also of renewal in its sense of community and purpose.
- Don’t afraid to laugh! Keep a sense of perspective and humor.
SESSION I (2 – 2½ hours)

30-35 minutes **Introduction**
Open with prayer (and a song if you like)
Introduce yourselves with names and your reason for joining or attending this church (allow one minute each, so if you have more than twenty people at your gathering break into smaller groups). Make a record of these stories.
Present: The purpose of this Mission Study — why you are doing it
The process of this Mission Study — what will happen when
Guidelines for our work together— openness, willingness to listen, etc.
The process of Session I— what will happen in this meeting

15 minutes **Become acquainted on a different level**
For each of the following questions, invite participants to stand along the wall according to where they ‘stand’ personally with regard to the question.
(participants will make a continuum from one extreme to the other):
- How long have you belonged to, or participated in, this church?
  (continuum: since earlier this year — for your entire life)
- How long have you been a Presbyterian?
  (never — since earlier this year — entire life)
- How many of your family members have ever belonged to, or participated actively in this church?
  (only myself — many relatives)
- Do you consider yourself a thinking person or a feeling person?
  (thinker — feeler)
- Do you consider yourself an introverted person or an extroverted person?
  (introvert — extrovert)
- When you think about the ministry of the church do your initial thoughts tend to be more about individuals and their needs or about the needs of the larger body?
  (individuals — larger body)
As you wrap up the exercise, acknowledge that we approach life differently and that is both a blessing and a challenge.
Discuss how this truth may affect your working together as a congregation.

30 minutes **Explore our faith**
Prepare *Exploring Our Faith* handouts from the related pages in this Guide.
Distribute handouts and complete as individuals for five minutes.
Divide the larger group into threes and discuss for twenty minutes.
Re-gather as a group and spend 5 minutes discussing learnings.
25-35 minutes **Recollections**
Divide the larger group into groups of 15 or fewer people.
Have people sitting in a circle so they can see one another as they speak.
Tell the group that each person will have about one minute to share his or her recollections. You may want to use timers to help the stories move along.
Remind the participants that remembering is an important part of the Judeo-Christian tradition. You may want to read Deut. 6:10-12 with its warning to take heed “lest you forget”.
Have a recorder taking notes in each group.
Ask each participant to share:
- Recollections of the most significant event in the life of the congregation since you have been a member? Details?
- List special or traditional things your congregation does every year.
When all have shared their recollections, ask the church historian or a person who searched the session records to report on ten important things that have happened in the life of the congregation.(you will need to ask someone to prepare this ahead of time).

10-15 minutes **Timeline**
Post a paper Timeline on a wall, beginning with the beginning of the church and continuing to the present day.
Have people go to the Timeline and add the following information to it:
- Identify when you or family became members of the congregation.
- What are the earliest memories of the congregation?
- Note important events in life of congregation — building changes, new programs, pastoral or staff changes, etc.
- Include significant events in the community, region, nation, world, and PC(USA) (mergers, factory closings, war, etc.)
Leave the timeline up and encourage the congregation to add to in the coming weeks.

10 minutes **Closing**
Reflect on Session I — Share discoveries about ourselves and the church.
Introduce Session II — when, where, major focus
Close with a song and prayer.
EXPLORING OUR FAITH

1. “Faith” has held many different meanings for people. Which statement comes closest to your view of faith? (circle only one response)
   a. A life of commitment of God, demonstrated by trying to do what is right.
   b. A decision to accept Christ, instead of continuing in one’s own sinful ways.
   c. A trust in God’s grace
   d. A belief in all that the Bible says
   e. As long as people are sincere in their beliefs, they show faith.
   f. The idea of faith does not seem meaningful to me.
   g. I am not sure, although I am convinced that faith is important.
   h. None of these applies; my view is __________________________

2. Which statement comes closest to your view of the way in which God influences what happens in the world? (Circle only one response)
   a. God sets history in motion but does not interfere with it anymore.
   b. God influences individuals who then shape events.
   c. God influences individuals but also shapes events directly through nations and social affairs.
   d. I do not think of God as “influencing” the things that happen.
   e. I am not sure, because I have not thought about it before.
   f. None of these applies; my view is __________________________

3. People often wonder how a merciful God allows terrible things to happen, such as the killing of six million Jews during World War II or the destruction of 9/11. Which response comes closest to your view of how God lets these things happen? (Circle only one response)
   a. God allows terrible things to happen in order to punish people for their sins.
   b. We do not know why these things happen, but God is able to use them for good.
   c. God does not have anything to do with these things; the devil causes them.
   d. People cause these things to happen, not God.
   e. I do not know how God can allow these things to happen; it does not seem right to me.
   f. I am not sure about this topic.
   g. None of these applies; my view is __________________________

4. Which statement comes closest to your view of life after death? (Circle only one response)
   a. There is no life after death.
   b. There must be something after death, but I have no idea what it may be like.
   c. There is life after death, but no punishment.
   d. There is life after death, with rewards for some people and punishment for others.
   e. The notion of reincarnation expresses my view of what happens to people after death.
   f. I am not sure whether or not there is life after death.
   g. None of these applies; my view is __________________________
5. Which statement comes closest to your view of the Bible? (Circle only one response)
   a. The Bible, though written by individuals, has been so controlled by the Holy Spirit that it is without error in all it teaches in matters of science and history as well as in matters of theology.
   b. The Bible, though written by individuals and reflecting their personalities, has been so controlled by the Holy Spirit that it is trustworthy in matters of theology and ethics, but not necessarily in matters of science and history.
   c. All of the Bible is both the inspired word of God and at the same time a thoroughly human document.
   d. Portions of the Bible, including some of its theological and ethical positions, may not be the inspired word of God.
   e. The Bible is merely a record of the moral and religious experiences of Hebrews and Christians.
   f. I am not sure that I can say.
   g. None of these applies; my view is ______________________________________________________

6. Which statement comes closest to your view of people in other countries who have never heard about Christ? (Circle only one response)
   a. I desire to share the love of Christ with them.
   b. If we do not preach Christ to them, then they will be damned forever.
   c. We should not worry about them, because so many people in this country have not heard about Christ.
   d. We should respect their religions and stop trying to impose Christianity upon them.
   e. I am not sure, because I have not considered it.
   f. None of these applies; my view is ______________________________________________________

7. Christians sometimes describe God as a “God of Justice” or a God who commands us to bring about justice. Which statement comes closest to your view of what this means. (Circle only one response)
   a. The Church should work for justice and should support groups that are working to end inequality and oppression.
   b. At a personal level, I should try to be just and fair in all of my dealings.
   c. This is a spiritual term that refers to God’s punishing evil, rather than to activities of the church or to individuals.
   d. The concept of god’s justice does not hold meaning for me.
   e. I am not sure to what it refers.
   f. None of these applies; my view is ______________________________________________________
SESSION II (2 – 2½ HOURS)

20-25 minutes **Introduction**
Open with prayer (and a song if you like)
Reintroduce yourselves with name and a hope for this Mission Study (be sure to record these)
Reflect upon Session I — things that stood out, learnings, discoveries, etc.
Discuss the process of Session II — what will happen today

10 minutes **Focus on the timeline**, noting changes from last time
Be prepared to comment on the changes over the years, past trends, etc., noting:
- what significant events happened in the immediate past decade, and
- what significant events happened in the decade prior to that one.
Continue to leave the timeline up during the mission study process.

5-10 minutes **Distribute and discuss a handout listing**
12 Assumptions that Guide Thoughts on the Church of Tomorrow by Bill Easum.
1. North America is the new mission field.
2. Society will become increasingly hostile toward Christianity in the twenty-first century.
3. The distinction between clergy and laity will disappear in the twenty-first century.
4. If churches only improve what they have been doing, they will die.
5. The best way to fail today is to improve yesterday’s successes.
6. Bureaucracies and traditional practices are the major causes of the decline of most denominations in North America.
7. Traditional churches that thrive in the twenty-first century will initiate radical changes before the year 2001.
8. God exists and creates every thing.
9. Jesus Christ is the center of all human life.
10. The Bible is our primary source of faith and practice.
11. The purpose of the Body of Christ is to bring the world to faith in Jesus Christ.
12. A way will be found to avoid world ecological and economic disaster.

15-20 minutes **Bible/Theological Study**
Prepare handouts or newsprint with the following questions:
- What does being the salt of the earth look like for you as a church?
- What are some of the ways your church has been the light of the world?
- How does the outside world see your good works?
Read Matthew 5: 13-16
Divide into groups of 3-4 and consider the questions.
Re-convene as a larger group and invite people to share a few comments in the whole group about what they discovered. Ask them NOT to report for their small group, but to respond to the question, “What was an insight you had about the Bible Study as you talked with each other?”
60-75 minutes **Present the Demographic Study**
Someone will need to have studied the demographic information and be prepared to present the data and an analysis of it.
Use of overhead projector and maps is great. Some of the information may need to be duplicated and handed out.
Take questions as they come up to make sure that this material is understood.

10 minutes **Closing**
Reflect upon Session II — major learnings
Introduce Session III — when, where, major focus
Close with a song and prayer.
SESSION 111 (2 – 2½ HOURS)

20 minutes **Welcome**
Open with prayer (and a song if you like)
Reintroduce yourselves with name & concern for the church you feel (be sure to record these)
Reflect upon Sessions I & II — major learnings
Discuss Session III — what will happen today

15-20 minutes **Reports on Community Study**
Each person who contacted a community leader needs to state who was interviewed and why, and then share briefly what their response was to the questions.
There should be a written report of these interviews already filed with the MST. Only take questions for clarification.

5 minutes **Financial Health of the Church**
The Session should make a brief report on the current financial health of the church.

30-40 minutes **Congregational Survey**
Present results of tabulation using overhead projector and analysis of major learnings from the Survey.

5-8 minutes **Strengths of the Church**
Brainstorm: compile a list of strengths of this church
Now combine the ideas lifted up into groupings of similar issues.
Save compiled list for use in Session V.

20 minutes **Study Scripture**
Prepare a handout with these questions on it:
1. What does Paul’s description say to you about the Church?
2. What three factors from Paul’s description ought to apply to all churches?
3. How does Paul’s description fit this particular church?
Distribute pencils, Bibles, and the handout for the Bible Study.
Divide into groups of four or five and in each group:
   • Have a volunteer read aloud I Corinthians 12:413
   • Write individual responses to the questions for five minutes
   • Discuss the questions in the small groups for 10 minutes

5-8 minutes **Reconvene and share significant insights from the Scripture study**
15-20 minutes **Identify Needs of Church and Community**
Distribute newsprint and markers to the groups.
Explain that brainstorming means that all ideas that are lifted up are accepted without debate and listed on sheets of newsprint.
Brainstorm 1: compile a list of needs of *church*
Combine the ideas lifted up into groupings of similar issues
Brainstorm 2: compile a list of needs of *community*
Combine the ideas lifted up into groupings of similar issues
Save the combined brainstorming lists for Session V

10 minutes **Closing**
Reflect upon Session III — major learnings
Introduce Session IV — when, where, major focus
Close with a song and a prayer.
SESSION IV (2 – 2½ HOURS)

20 minutes  Welcome
Open with prayer (and a song if you like)
Reintroduce yourselves with name & a thought or feeling that has arisen about the
church since this study began.(record these)
Invite the group to reflect upon Sessions I & II & III — share major learnings
Discuss Session IV — what will happen today

5-10 minutes  Timeline and Community Study
Comment briefly on any significant changes in the timeline
Invite any reports on interviews which have not been made yet

15-20 minutes  Study Scripture
Prepare a handout with the following questions:
1. What do Paul’s words say to you about setting goals for the future?
2. What does Scripture say to you about planning?
3. What does the life of Jesus say to you about planning?
4. What does the early Church say to you about planning?
Distribute pencils, Bibles and handouts.
Divide the larger group into groups of four or five and in each group.
In each group:
• Have a volunteer read aloud Philippians 3:12-14.
• Write individual responses to the questions.
• Discuss the questions and answers as a small group

5 minutes  Reconvene and share significant insights from the Scripture study

10 minutes  What is a Vision Statement?
Spend some time explaining what a Vision Statement is using these
Characteristics of a Good Vision Statement:
• The vision is faithful to the congregation’s best understanding of its
  religious heritage.
• The vision statement is oriented to the future.
• The vision is appropriate to this congregation.
• The vision statement is realistic in terms of the congregation’s context.
• The vision statement contains both judgment and promise, good news and
  bad news.
• The vision is, in so far as is possible, a shared image of the desired future.
• The vision statement is specific enough to provide direction for the
  congregation’s life, but broad enough to encompass multiple but
  complementary visions important to groups within the congregation.
Consider sharing some Vision Statements from the book Congregational Mission
Studies as examples.
Make clear that a Vision Statement is not goals nor objectives; rather, goals and
objectives will be built upon the Vision Statement.
20 minutes **Visioning**
Re-divide the larger group into small groups, ensuring individuals are with all new group members and no family members in the same group.
Distribute newsprint and markers to the groups.
Each small group should write two sentences describing a vision for the future of this church.
These sentences should seek to address the questions:
1. What kind of community of faith are we called to be?
2. What kinds of activities are we called to do as a people of God?
(questions taken from *Congregational Mission Studies*, page 18.05)

15-30 minutes **Share Vision Statements**
Post each group’s work and have each group read its sentences aloud.
Discuss similarities and differences in the sentences.
Work toward consensus on some major points, perhaps by choosing important words and phrases to recommend to the MST for their on-going work.

10 minutes **Closing**
Reflect upon Session IV — share major learnings
Introduce Session V — when, where, major focus
Close with a song and prayer.
SESSION V (2 – 2½ HOURS)

20-25 minutes Welcome
Open with prayer (and a song if you like)
Reintroduce yourselves with name & joy about this church for which you are thankful.(record these)
Have the group reflect upon Sessions I & II & III & IV — share major learnings
Discuss Session V — what will happen today

15-20 minutes Study Scripture
Prepare a handout with the following questions:
1. What do the words of Hebrews say to you about persevering?
2. What does Scripture say to you about the community of faith?
3. What does Hebrews say to you about the joy of life in faith?
4. What example does Christ set for us in living lives focused on God’s goals?
Distribute pencils, Bibles and handouts.
Divide into groups of four or five.
In each group:
• Have a volunteer read aloud Hebrews 12:1-2
• Write individual responses to the questions
• Discuss the questions and responses.

5 minutes Reconvene and share significant insights from the Scripture study

5 minutes Vision Statement
Recap of the Vision Statements developed at the last gathering
Post the new Vision Statement for all to see.
5 minutes  **Introduction to Goal Setting**

Post the newsprint results of the brainstorming exercise in Session III
Quickly review the clusters of items on the list.
Spend some time introducing the process of goal setting:
- Introduce the importance of goal setting by stating that the purpose of planning is to organize our ministry.
- Remind the folk that we plan because the reason behind our planning is important - namely the mission of the body of Christ.
- The best way to plan is to give ourselves some goals to achieve.
- For goals to be workable they must have three characteristics:
  S - Specific: Peace on earth is too broad, safety in our neighborhood is specific
  A - Attainable: Can it be done in the time allotted and with the resources available?
  M - Measurable: Will you know when you have attained your goal? How?
- Goals begin with some kind of verb: for example, “to develop…”
  When you write your goals, consider the following verbs: CHOOSE, DECIDE, RESOLVE, BUILD, EXPAND, SERVE, STUDY, INCREASE, DESIGN
- As you think about the church, imagine several kinds of goals
  goals that MAINTAIN a solid existing program;
  goals that DEVELOP a weaker existing program;
  goals that ADD brand new programs, and
  goals that REMOVE the ineffective programs. (Sometimes adding a new program requires deleting an old one).

20-30 minutes  **Developing Goals**

Divide into at least three small groups no larger than 10 each, encourage family groups to split among small groups.
Distribute newsprint and markers.
Have each group develop 3 goals, write them on newsprint, and bring them back to the larger group.

15-20 minutes  **Sharing Goals**

Have each group post their newsprint and present their goals.
After all the groups have shared, invite a conversation by asking two questions:
- Where do you see some similarity among these goals?
- Where do you see some differences that will need to be reconciled?

Try to reach some consensus on three to six goals that seem most important.
If you have difficulty doing this you can find suggestions on pg. 18.13 in Congregational Mission Studies.
15-20 minutes **Developing Objectives**

Help the participants understand Objectives:

- An objective is a way to begin to reach the goal. For instance, if your goal is to grow in membership by 10% each year for the next five years, your objectives would be specific things you could do to help you attain that goal.
- Once again, groups will need to apply the SAM characteristics:
  
  - S — Specific, A — Attainable, M — Measurable.

Divide the larger group into evenly sized groups of 8-20 people.

Distribute newsprint and markers to each group.

Assign three to six goals to each group. Note: In larger churches, some groups might work on the same goals; in smaller churches you might only be able to assign one or two goals to each group. Ensure that all goals are assigned to at least one group.

Ask each group to develop two or more objectives for each goal.

Invite the groups to list their objectives on newsprint and bring them back to the whole group.

10 minutes **Report Objectives**

Invite each group to report on the objectives it developed.

Remind the gathering that these may well not be the only objectives needed to reach these goals but it is a way to begin thinking about what will be needed.

10 minutes **Closing**

Thank everyone for participating in the Congregational Gatherings.

Share what the next steps in the mission study will be.

Close with a song and prayer.
**RESOURCES**
A Field Guide to U.S. Congregations, Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce (WJK, Louisville, London)
Congregational Mission Studies, James Cushman, Henry Snedeker-Meier, Bruce Tischler, David Wasserman
Smaller Church Mission Study Guide, Henry A. Blunk

**SERVICES**
(Work on this section currently in process)