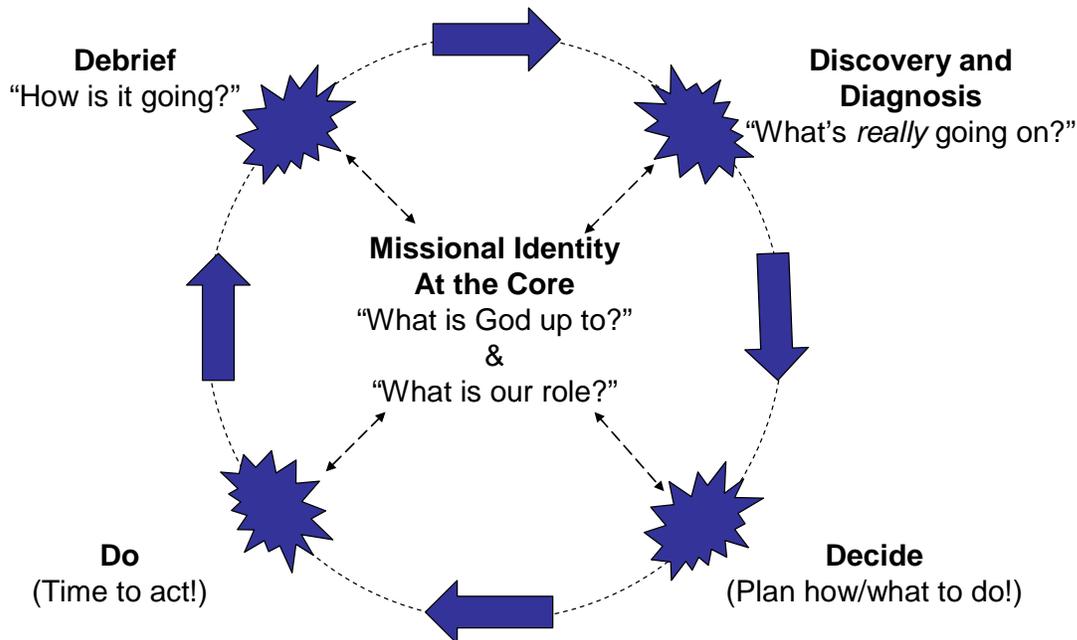


Mission Renewal Process Overview
Saint Paul Area Synod, ELCA
2012-2014

Introduction: The purpose of the Mission Renewal Process is to help congregations answer the question, “What is God calling us to be and do in this time and place?” It follows that, in order to answer this question, there needs to be a deeper understanding of the three actors in this equation: God, us, and this time and place. The first step in gaining a deeper understanding is listening, and the MRP incorporates focused listening to God, listening to the congregation, and listening to the community.¹ This listening calls forth specific actions that form the core practices of the MRP: prayer, dwelling in the Word, and intentional conversations, all of which foster the development of a missional imagination that can transform congregational life.

Congregations are encouraged to embrace the fact that they are embarking on a long, slow, journey of change, one that may well take 5-10 years, and that the cycle illustrated below will be repeated many, many times. Each iteration of the cycle will hopefully move them into deeper engagement in God’s mission in their context.

A Process Map for Ongoing Transformational Ministry



¹ While the word “community” can be used to describe the Christian community or congregation, for the purposes of this process the word “community” is used interchangeably with the word “neighborhood” to denote the context in which the congregation is set.

Workshop #1: Listening to God (October 27, 2012)

Congregations that are interested in participating in the process are invited to send a team of 4-8 people, including the pastor, to a three hour workshop. Teams begin with a devotional bible study on Ephesians, then are introduced the process as a whole, which involves six workshops spread over an 18-month period, with “homework” assignments to be completed between the workshops. The teams will then be introduced to the first step of listening to God through dwelling in the Word and prayer. There will also be a discussion of how congregations are not the focus of God’s mission, but tools for the fulfillment of God’s mission.

Assignments for the interim:

Teams will be asked to commit to doing the following things:

1. Submit a payment of \$150 per congregation for participating in this 18-month process.
2. Commit to regular meetings as a team to read and discuss *Unbinding the Gospel*. Ideally, this involves meeting weekly to discuss the chapters and work through the 40 day prayer journal, with eight weekly meetings held over a two-month period.
3. The pastor commits to monthly meetings with the other pastors of this cohort, convened and facilitated by synod staff.

Workshop #2: Listening to Each Other (January, 2013)

The second workshop begins with a time for checking in on the work they have been doing as a team, spend time dwelling in the Word (John 4:1-42), and then receive training on relational evangelism and one-on-one interviews. The teams are then asked to strategize on how to conduct a listening campaign in their congregations. The timing of this campaign will vary from congregation to congregation, but could take place during Lent of 2013.

Assignments for the interim:

Teams will be asked to commit to doing the following things:

1. Continue to meet regularly as a team.
2. Continue to engage in public and personal prayer for renewal.
3. Continue to dwell in the Word at all meetings of the congregation and committees.
4. The pastor continues to participate in the monthly meetings with the other pastors.
5. Commit to developing an ongoing process of prayer and biblical reflection that spreads through the entire congregation, beginning each committee or small group meeting with a text and asking these questions: What is God doing in this passage? What is God calling us to do?
6. Begin or expand a prayer ministry, in which all members of the congregation are invited to regularly pray for God’s transforming grace to be present, and prayers for renewal and transformation are regularly included in public worship.
7. Doing one-on-ones with the other members of their team.
8. Engage in a process of listening in the congregation. This process can include a listening (one-on-one) campaign or a series of cottage meetings.² The process chosen needs to include members of varying levels of activity, and will conclude with a session facilitated by someone from the synod staff to evaluate the process and reflect on these questions:
 - a. What are the primary themes that emerged from the listening campaign?

² Rouse, Rick and Van Gelder, Craig, *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation: Embarking on a Journey of Transformation*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008, pp. 50-52.

- b. What are the areas of ministry that seem to be calling for attention?
 - c. Are there points of tension or conflict that need to be addressed?
 - d. What are the points of energy and excitement in the congregation?
 - e. Is there a sense of urgency to engage in a process of change?
9. Partner with another congregation in the cohort to be “worship spies” for each other, assessing the hospitality and ease of entry for newcomers.

Workshop #3: Listening to the Community (late April/early May, 2013)

Now that congregations have engaged in listening to each other, they will be encouraged to explore their immediate context. The workshop begins with a reporting of the work done by each congregation since the last workshop, followed by a time of dwelling in the Word, focusing on Luke 10:1-12. Teams are then invited to consider how they can “listen to their community,” focusing on two related but distinct efforts: an exploration of the needs and desires of the neighborhood, and an evaluation of the gifts and resources of the congregation and neighborhood. The congregation will be led through a process of immersing themselves into the neighborhood, not so much seeking problems that need to be solved, but trying to identify the points of suffering and the yearnings and desires of their neighbors.

The assignment for the interim will be to gather input from the neighborhood on the most pressing needs and concerns. Teams may also choose to conduct a broader asset-mapping activity involving a larger portion of the congregation. Teams will be encouraged to refrain from moving too quickly into a “problem-solving” mode, but to take the time to listen to the community and to enter into the needs and hurts of their neighbors. Time for action will come, but not just yet.

Assignments for the interim:

1. Continue to meet regularly as a team.
2. Continue to engage in public and personal prayer for renewal.
3. Continue to dwell in the Word at all meetings of the congregation and committees.
4. The pastor continues to participate in the monthly meetings with the other pastors.
5. Explore the needs and desires of the neighborhood by conducting one-on-one interviews with key community leaders and residents, a neighborhood canvas, house meetings, and/or community forums.
6. Conduct an asset-mapping activity for the entire congregation.
7. Bring to the next workshop a list of the top five needs and top five gifts of the congregation and the top five needs and top five gifts of the neighborhood/community.

Workshop #4: Imagining a Missional Experiment (late August/early September, 2013)

This workshop will focus on moving from information gathering and relationship building into action, understanding that action also helps gather information and build relationships. Congregational teams will take time to reflect on Isaiah 58, asking the questions, “What are the breaches that need repairing in our context?” and “How do we refrain from pursuing our own interests?” Discussion will then focus on the differences between attractional and incarnational ministry, technical and adaptive change, and the need to initiate small experiments that can impact the entire system of the congregation without threatening it. Teams will also be introduced to the concept of asset-mapping within the congregation and neighborhood and led in exercises that will help them identify their own personal assets, the assets of their congregation, and the assets of their neighborhood, so that they

might begin to envision how these assets could be brought together to bless the community and the world.

Teams will then be asked to design and then implement a specific, measurable, and attainable experiment that will begin to move the culture of the congregation into a new missional posture. The synod staff members will then schedule times to meet with each congregational team within the coming month to work on shaping this experiment, which will hopefully be implemented before the next workshop. Based on this work, the team will agree upon a theological metaphor that will guide their work for the coming year. This metaphor will be rooted in scripture, taking an image from a parable, story, or psalm, and will be shared with the congregation as a focal point for the work of transformation for the coming year.

Workshop #5: Where Do We Go From Here? (January, 2014)

This workshop will give teams the chance to evaluate and celebrate the action they engaged in and reflect on the process thus far. Time will be spent dwelling in the Word and returning to the original question: What is God calling us to be and do in this time and place? Teams will also review what they have learned from their missional experiment and what they have learned through the whole process of mission renewal. Teams will learn several methods of evaluation and spend time making plans for their next steps. This process will result in the development of a three year missional plan, including goals, strategies, processes, outcomes and resources needed.

Workshop #6: Let's Make it Happen (late March/early April, 2014)

This workshop will focus on presentations of the missional plans that congregations have developed, offering constructive feedback to each other. Congregations will decide whether they want to submit their plans for funding to the ELCA Transformational Ministry Partnership grant program, or the ELCA Domestic Hunger grant program, or whether they will need other forms of support and accountability to make their plans a reality.

Resources

- Jacobsen, Dennis A. *Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001
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- Snow, Luther K. *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts*. Herndon, Va.: Alban Institute, 2004

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