

CHAPTER 3

WHY DOES THIS CONGREGATION EXIST?

This section of the Stewardship Resource Handbook briefly discusses three closely related matters:

1. The importance of a clear purpose or mission
2. The connection between stewardship and congregational purpose
3. Specific actions to clarify and lift up the congregational mission

How important is the mission of our local congregation in the hearts and minds of its members? If it ceased to exist, would it be missed?

There are many demands for our time, talents and money. One of these is our local congregation. We weigh the importance of these competing demands and apply our resources to those we judge to be most important. These comparisons of relative importance are often subconscious and emotional and in some cases made with too little information.

As Christian stewards, we are commissioned to do an important job. (Mt. 28:16-20) We have been entrusted with the time, talents and resources to do that job. Everything we have is a gift from God - 100% of our time, talents and treasure- and managing those gifts is important to our Christian mission. In the hectic lives we lead, it is easy to lose sight of our central purpose and mission as stewards. We should, therefore, periodically ask ourselves a couple of questions: “Is my purpose and mission as an individual and as a member of our congregation clear?” and “Is my congregation’s mission clear?” We cannot be effective, joyful stewards unless we are clear about what it is we are to manage and care for and we consider our stewardship role to be unimportant.

Jesus had a very clear mission. It was to help people experience the Kingdom of God. That was the purpose of his teaching, the purpose of his life. This mission involved presenting to the world a totally radical way of life; a way of life which really put others first; serving others and showing God’s love by example. In stewardship-related terms, Jesus’ central mission was to demonstrate through his words and daily actions what it means to acknowledge, responsibly care for and generously share God’s gifts. Stewardship of life for Jesus meant modeling God’s unconditional love and what it means in practical terms to love our neighbor. When asked what was truly important, Jesus’ answer was simple: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ” (Mt. 22:37-39)

Jesus both invites and commands us to join him in carrying out his mission. He warns us that discipleship has a high cost. (Lk. 14:27-33) But we are also invited to experience the inexplicable joy of servant hood and life as a steward. (Jn 15:9-17)

Stewardship growth in both the personal and the congregational areas goes smoother if the mission is clear. Several things can be done to be certain the mission is clear.

1. Develop and/or review your congregation's mission statement. See the information below entitled "Developing Mission" for additional information. Your synod stewardship resource persons can also be of help.
2. Allocate a specific portion of each council meeting to a penetrating review and discussion of your congregation's mission. Assess the effectiveness in carrying it out, evaluating the ways in which every activity or program supports the mission.
3. Communicate the congregation's mission statement and how it is being implemented to the membership; talk about it.
4. Because congregational change must be preceded by individual change it may be useful to recommend that key leaders develop a personal mission statement. See Chapter 12 for additional information.

We have been given much. We have an important role as stewards in the management of what has been entrusted to us. We have a mission! To exercise good stewardship, we must be very clear about what that mission is. This requires that we regularly and rigorously reexamine our mission and are honest and disciplined in determining how effective we are in our stewardship, making changes where we see the need to do so.

The costs of discipleship are high but the benefits are unbelievable!

DEVELOPING MISSION

The Biblical Basis:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20)

What It Is:

A mission (purpose) statement describes our church and the primary reasons for its existence. As such, it becomes a base on which specific activities can be built.

A mission statement provides a basis:

1. To think seriously together (theologically and biblically) about our church.
2. To think about the world to which we are called to minister.
3. To evaluate how well our church works in performing its tasks.
4. In setting priorities, choosing programs and projects and evaluating results.

Content:

Generally, a mission statement identifies four major points:

1. What especially characterizes us as a church.
2. What major parts of God's work we will undertake.
3. To whom we will minister: ourselves; others; what others.
4. The major services we will provide.

A Sample Mission Statement :

The mission of (this) Lutheran Church is to support one another in loving fellowship as with God's help we celebrate our faith by worshipping together, by learning His word, by serving persons in and beyond our community, and by living lives that proclaim Christ's gifts of forgiveness and reconciliation and witness to His desire for peace and unity.

Procedure:

1. Consider together as a council the biblical mission of the whole church; for example Exodus 3:13-17; Ester 4:14; Isaiah 53; Jeremiah 7:1-15; Mark 8:27-38; John 3:16-20; John 8:31-36; John 10:7-18; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Ephesians 1; Ephesians 4:1-16; 1 John 2:7-11.
2. Appoint a small writing group and/or ask individual members of council to prepare a draft mission statement describing in 100 words or less the four content points; the more concise and exact, the better.
3. Discuss the draft statement in council and reach a consensus before preparing a final draft for congregational consideration. Don't hurry. The process may take several months of discussions and revisions.

4. Distribute copies of the draft statement to all members of the congregation at least one week before a congregational meeting.
5. Discuss the statement at a congregational meeting, again seeking approval by consensus. The final statement must embody congregational agreement about mission.
6. Use the approved statement as support for program, project, and budgetary decisions.
7. Support the project by having council members consult with individual church members throughout the whole process.
8. Encourage the pastor to preach about mission during the development of the statement and afterwards.
9. After approval, keep the statement in front of the congregation by reproducing it in bulletins, newsletters and so on.
10. Review the mission statement at least every five years -- more often if needed--and revise as indicated.

RESOURCES

Schaller, Lyle E., *Effective Church Planning* 1979

Lee, Harris W. *Effective Church Leadership* 1989

Callahan, Kennon *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church* 1983

