

How to build faithful mission partnerships: A guide for pastors



Whether a church has long-established mission partnerships or is not engaged in any mission activity, the foundation of healthy mission work begins with healthy relationships within the church. Regardless of whether you are a new or seasoned pastor, consider approaching congregational mission work in the same way you might approach cross-cultural mission.

- 1. Know your church, know the context.** Reflect on your church's size, context, mission activity and mission leadership. Is the number of mission activities proportional to the size of the congregation? How broad is the participation of church members and mission leadership? Ask questions to learn how mission is carried out in the church and whether the mission/outreach committee or the session is seeking guidance.
- 2. Discern your role and the scope of your leadership.** If you're the mission pastor of the church, you will have time and resources to work on bigger-picture matters of how and with whom the church engages in mission. If you're the solo pastor, you'll be covering many areas of church life and ministry and may not have time or influence in the church's mission decisions or development. In the context of the church to which you are called to pastor, what is the best and most appropriate role for you in relation to mission?
- 3. Be a pastor first.** You may have a lot to share about what you've learned about mission. You may be passionate about undoing mission or outreach that seems paternalistic or colonial-minded. But how will you approach the life-long member of your congregation who just wants to help? Think about how you will preach and teach about mission over time and in ways that members will have "ears to hear." Be patient and nurturing.
- 4. Listen, learn and let members lead.** What are the passions of church members? Learn what they love and find practical ways to help them to lead faithfully and well. Strive for processes that build from the ground-up and facilitate member participation so that ideas spring from them rather than from you, from other church staff, or from only one or two church members. In churches where there is very little mission activity outside of member care, start conversations or lead Christian Education opportunities to inspire the church to reach out by building on their assets, such as the church's location or the gifts and skills of members.
- 5. Affirm existing mission activity.** Don't assume the best or the worst about the mission or outreach work that the church is already doing. Meet members where they are, and affirm mission activities and leaders.
- 6. Be vulnerable, be humble.** As a teaching and preaching framework, consider telling stories of how you've been transformed in your understanding of mission. If you tell about a paradigm shift in mission *that you have personally experienced*, and share your vulnerability, church members may become more open to new ways of understanding mission. Help them see you as a partner with them in learning. If you are seeking to learn more about mission as a mutual endeavor, begin a journey of learning together with your congregation. See number 8.
- 7. Seek wisdom from mission partners.** Bring local or global mission partners into the church to teach and preach. Sometimes an outside voice or a perspective from a person in a community your church is serving helps church members gain fresh insight. When establishing or re-shaping a mission partnership, look to mission partner "bridge people" to help your church and the mission partner community relate with one another in healthy, sustainable ways that uphold the dignity and equity of all involved. "Bridge people" include PC(USA) mission co-workers. Learn more about them at www.pcusa.org/missionconnections.
- 8. Understand that change takes time.** Church and mission are all about relationships, and relationships are complex. They are rife with politics, strong feelings and personalities. When your church is ready to move to next steps, tools are available from Presbyterian World Mission to go deeper in learning about healthy, faithful mission; to discern and focus mission involvement; and to build strong mission partnerships. Find PC(USA) resources for mission at www.pcusa.org/missionresources.