



Engaging in New Modes of Ministry

How can congregations worship and serve faithfully in a strange time, when we are not gathered in bodily presence? How can PC(USA) congregations live in an online presence in ways that are authentically Presbyterian? How can telephone calls and mailings and drive-in worship be shaped faithfully? What theological and liturgical distinctives shape Presbyterian congregational life even when we gather at a distance? How can online and other forms of congregational connection strengthen our connectional commitments to one another?

As PC(USA) congregations have established and widened their use of distanced connections questions like these have become pressing. This document is designed to help congregations think through some central theological questions raised by the opportunity to connect with people who are physically distant.

In what follows we lift up ten summary statements of the PC(USA)'s understanding of what it is to be the Church, drawn from the *Book of Order*. After the statement there are a few questions for reflection designed to help an individual or a group (perhaps a session, or a committee) reflect on how ministry to and with those who engage while physically distant can embody the best wisdom of the affirmations we make about the Christian life, and about our distinctive Presbyterian way of living that life. We hope that each statement and set of questions provides the basis for a substantial discussion. Those leading discussion can discern which of the ten will help the community in its discernment.

I. Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, and the Church is Christ's body

We believe, in keeping with the witness of Scripture, that Jesus Christ is the head of the Church (F-1.02) and the Church is the body of Christ (F-1.0301). As you discern new modes of ministry:

- How does your congregation acknowledge and honor Christ as Lord?
- How are you listening and responding to Christ's calling?
- How has Christ equipped you for worship and service?
- How are you connected as Christ's body—within your congregation and presbytery, and to the denomination and universal Church?
- How do you live and serve as Christ's body in the world?

II. The Church is a community of faith, hope, love, and witness

We believe, in keeping with the first Christians, that the Church is a community of faith, hope, love and witness (F-1.0301). As you discern new modes of ministry:

- How are you living in faith, entrusting the life of the Church to God?
- How are you living in hope, watching for God's new creation?
- How are you living in love, seeking forgiveness and reconciliation?
- How are you bearing witness, pointing to the gospel of Jesus Christ?

III. The Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic

We believe, in keeping with the Nicene Creed, that the Church is "one holy catholic and apostolic" (F-1.0302). Each of these Nicene "marks of the Church" implies a gift from God and a calling for God's people. As you discern new modes of ministry:

- One: How do you promote the oneness of the Church within and beyond your congregation, seeking full communion in the body of Christ?

- Holy: How do you practice ongoing repentance, in response to Christ’s redeeming work?
- Catholic: How do you provide for unity and diversity, seeking to overcome alienation and division?
- Apostolic: How do you keep continuity with the teaching of Christ as you share in his mission? How are all of those who are part of your congregation sent into the world to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed?

IV. The Church is a community of word, sacrament, and faithful order

We believe, in keeping with the Protestant reformers, that the Church is where Christ is, and Christ is where “the Word of God is truly preached and heard, the Sacraments are rightly administered, and ecclesiastical discipline is uprightly ministered” in the context of covenant community (F-1.0303). As you discern new modes of ministry:

- How is the Word of God preached *and* heard?
- How are the Sacraments administered, and in what ways is this consistent with Christ’s institution?
- In what ways is this community organized and working in ways that bear witness to new life in Jesus Christ?

V. The Church is a community reaching toward six great ends

We believe, in keeping with our Presbyterian forebears, that the “Great Ends of the Church” are: “the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world” (F-1.0304). As you discern new modes of ministry:

- How are you sharing the good news of God’s saving love?
- How are you caring for people in body, mind, and spirit?
- How are you glorifying God through worship and service?
- How are you seeking the truth and way of Christ together?
- How are you speaking up and taking action for what is right?
- How are you a living sign of the realm of God on earth?

VI. The Church is a community of shared leadership and broad participation

We believe, in keeping with the Presbyterian form of government, that the “basic form of ministry is the ministry of the whole people of God, from whose midst some are called to ordered ministries, to fulfill particular functions” (G-2.0201) as deacons, ruling elders, and ministers of Word and Sacrament. As you discern new modes of ministry:

- How are the whole people of God—and particularly those not ordained as deacons, ruling elders, and ministers—engaged in the congregation’s worship and service?
- How are deacons and ruling elders fulfilling their function and using their gifts as spiritual leaders in the congregation?
- How are other trained or certified leaders—such as Christian educators and church musicians—actively involved in new forms of ministry?
- How are ministers of Word and Sacrament sharing leadership and service with others?
- How is the ministry of those serving in leadership enabling broad participation?

VII. The Church is a community faithfully grounded in time, space, and matter

We believe, in keeping with the PC(USA) Directory for Worship, that “time, space, and matter are all created by God, redeemed by Christ, and made holy by the Spirit” (W-1.0201). As you discern new modes of ministry:

- How do you worship and serve God at certain times, and in the context of this time in the life of the Church and world? How does your worship and service enable members to be together in time?
- How do you worship and serve God in particular places, and in the context of your neighborhood, region, nation, and world?
- How do you worship and serve God with material gifts, and in the context of the human bodies and physical resources in your community? When and how does the community share communal gifts?

- How do these dimensions of the Church’s ministry intersect and relate to one another in your congregation?

VIII. The Church is a community that is contextual, cross-cultural, transcultural, countercultural

We believe, in keeping with ecumenical partners, that Christian worship is “contextual,” “cross-cultural,” “transcultural,” and “countercultural” (W-1.0304). As you discern new modes of ministry:

- How is that ministry contextual, “emerging from a particular community and incorporating the words, images, symbols, and actions that best convey the good news of Jesus Christ in that gathering of God’s people” (W-1.0304)?
- How is that ministry cross-cultural, “reflecting the diversity of traditions and cultures within and beyond the community of faith” (W-1.0304)?
- How is that ministry transcultural, “proclaiming the universal message of God’s grace in Jesus Christ and rooted in common elements of human life that transcend all cultures” (W-1.0304)?
- How is that ministry countercultural, “asserting the scandal of the gospel and anticipating God’s reign of righteousness, justice, and peace” (W-1.0304)?

IX. The Church is a community of diversity in its unity

We believe, in keeping with the priesthood of all believers, that faithful ministry “demands the “full, conscious, and active participation of the whole body of Christ,” including people of all ages, backgrounds, experiences, and abilities (W-2.0201). As you discern new modes of ministry:

- How does your congregation’s ministry engage people of all ages and foster intergenerational relationships?
- How do new modes of ministry support that full participation of people with different economic situations, cultural traditions, and levels of experience with the Christian faith?
- How are people of differing abilities involved in the leadership and service of your congregation?

X. The Church is a community joining in the Holy Spirit’s work

Finally, **we believe**, in keeping with the prophets, that God is doing a “new thing,” springing forth even here and now (Isa. 43:19). **We believe** that the Church is “reformed, always to be reformed according to the Word of God in the power of the Spirit” (F-2.02). As you discern new modes of ministry:

- What other contexts and considerations inform your process of discernment?
- How is God speaking through Scripture and in contemporary experience?
- How is God doing a new thing in your community of faith?

How is God continuing to reform your congregation, this denomination, and the Church universal according to the Word and in the power of the Spirit?

