



# What is Mission?

## An Intergenerational Experience

Most congregations have something they call “mission,” and we often have a common definition around the call of Jesus to “go and do likewise” from the story of the Good Samaritan or the call of Jesus to care for one another in Matthew 25:31–46. Mission can be everything from offerings to volunteering and from working at the shelter, in your basement, next-door or across the world.

Taking some time to consider together with your mission team, the whole congregation or the participants in a particular mission partnership what Christian mission is and why we do it can be very helpful in doing mission well and intentionally. This conversation could be an event, a class, a part of your community-building, preparation for a trip or an intentional practice for your mission committee.

### What does Scripture tell us about Christian mission?

The Bible has many resources to help us understand where the ideas of Christian mission and service come from, how we can best do them as disciples of Jesus and participate in good partnerships with those whose work we join in doing service.

Some Scriptures to consider:

- Matthew 23:11–12
- Matthew 25:31–46
- Luke 10:25–37
- John 12:25–26
- Romans 12

### What does the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) say about mission?

The Book of Order has some good words to help us think about what mission is and why we do it. Take a look at the following topics:

- F-1.01, GOD’S MISSION
- F1.0302d, The Apostolicity of the Church
- F-1.0304, The Great Ends of the Church

### Gathering around mission

What ways are familiar in your church to think about mission? Which Bible story would come to mind in your church if you asked what mission is? What agencies does your church partner with financially or with activities to do mission?

Would everyone in your church know the answers to these questions? Whatever the answers may be, having an event to introduce Christian mission — both as a call of all Christians and in the particularity of your church’s work — is a great way to explore mission and God’s work in your midst.

### Gather at the table

Christ calls us to do mission and calls us together in the meal of Communion. Likewise, food is a great way to gather people of all ages. Having a meal together also offers some opportunities to gather an intergenerational group to get to know one another. As you think about gathering for a meal, here are some things to consider:

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- Mix the ages and groups at each table by assigning tables based on a common interest, random color assignments on nametags, by birth month or some other way that encourages people to speak to others they do not know well. Remember that young children should probably stay with their guardians.
- Have a question on each table as people sit before the meal to get their conversation started. Some ideas for this question are:
  - What is your favorite way to help others?
  - Who have you helped this week?
  - What kind of things do you love to do when you have free time?
- When everyone is gathered and the meal is ready to be served, have each table pray silently and ask someone under 16 to pray aloud, or someone who was born in April or whatever way they choose. Then encourage each table to have people of different ages do different tasks like, the ones listed below, to encourage everyone to feel included in leading the meal.
  - Young ones gather the silverware and cups.
  - Teens get the food or desserts for the table.
  - The oldest one gets water or drinks.
  - The person who got there first takes the garbage to be thrown out.
- Once everyone has eaten and the tables are cleared, introduce the core idea of mission. This can be done with the reading of a Scripture text, watching a video together, focusing on one of the phrases from the Book of Order or offering a definition that your church uses (perhaps from a mission or vision statement).
- Once a clear definition is offered to ground conversation, perhaps do an activity that includes whatever partners your church does mission alongside.
  - One activity might be to list all the organizations your church partners with in mission: from PC(USA) agencies and co-workers to local, national and international partners.
  - Include folks of all ages in the conversation. Try having a list of the agencies you work with and ask someone at each table to read them. Then discuss how everyone remembers working with those partners: Have you packed food with them? Have you given money in an offering? Did you put coins in a fish bank to help their work? Did someone come from that partner, and you heard them speak?
  - Once you have introduced the partners, you might have the logos of those partner agencies on cardboard bricks, or another toy you have on hand, and build a “wall of service” so everyone can see whom you work with.
  - As you discuss with the big group what each group does, move the bricks to match their work. Perhaps divide them in different ways and move the agencies each time. Ask: Is the agency local, national or international? Does it assist with emergency needs, ongoing needs or systemic needs? Does your church give to it through financial gifts, ongoing volunteering or mission trips?
  - Perhaps have these different ways of looking at the agencies as signs and give each table one or two of the signs. As you discuss the ways of looking at how you work with them, have children and youth take the various bricks/logos to the table where each agency fits. If it fits in more than one, discuss where it fits best.
  - Conclude by having the “wall” reassembled at the front of the space so that everyone can see all your partners.

Conclude your time together by refocusing on what mission is and how we are called to do it. Perhaps read one of the following children’s books that help focus on our call to do mission.

- “Last Stop on Market Street,” by Matt De La Peña.
- “Cups Held Out,” by Judith L. Roth.
- “A Song for Lena,” by Hilary Horder Hippely.
- “Anna Was Here,” by Jane Kurtz.
- “We Shall Overcome: The Story of a Song,” by Debbie Levy.
- “The Good Garden: How One Family Went from Hunger to Having Enough,” by Katie Smith Milway.
- “Wangari’s Trees of Peace,” by Jeanette Winter.



- “My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother,” by Patricia Polacco (helpful with the Good Samaritan story).
- “Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family’s Journey,” by Margaret Ruurs; translated by Falah Raheem.

### **Different needs, different service**

When it comes to serving our community or the world, there are some general ways and times of life we often find ourselves serving. One helpful way to start unpacking with your community how your church serves, and other ways that service might be done, could begin by looking at your mission partners and their services in the areas of (1) emergency needs, (2) ongoing needs and (3) systemic needs.

**Emergency needs** are services that provide assistance any time people in the world suffer a crisis or disaster and need basic assistance to live life.

**Ongoing needs** are services that assist with needs that make it possible for folks to live daily life when their circumstances would otherwise not provide access to basic needs.

**Systemic needs** can be defined as the ways that culture, society or particular institutions and structures keep folks from equal and fair access to resources and to living a good life. This one is sometimes called “social justice” or “restorative justice.”

Many nonprofits, religious-based or not, provide assistance in all three of these areas, but some work primarily in one more than the others or only in one.

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