***Where to Start – Mission Statements & Core Values***

Identifying one specific mission for a church is often viewed as an overwhelming task. Ideally a mission statement would be set for the very long term, but we need to remember that there is a difference between being ‘unchanging’ and actually making progress in one general direction.

For PC(USA) churches, God is unchanging. The Word of God is unchanging. The Essential Tenets of the Reformed Faith are unchanging. The Great Ends of the Church are unchanging. As for the methods that we use to keep us heading toward what all of these ‘unchanging’ pieces are pointing to? That’s where “…reformed, always reforming…” comes into play.

What we do and how we do it needs to be somewhat fluid in order to be effective in the ever-changing context of ministry. That is where the concepts of vision, mission, core values, etc., fit into the life of the church. The question before us today: where do we start?

The best place to begin, of course, is right where we are. Describe the congregation as it is right now. What do people like most about this church? What is most important in the life of this church today? Why are those things/ideas/activities important to the church members? When were people most proud of this church & why? What has contributed most to growth in the spiritual life of the members? In what ways will the congregation take these types of experiences and pass them along to future generations and the surrounding community? What are the ministry needs in this area that are begging for attention?[[1]](#endnote-1)

Although somewhat simplistic, these kinds of questions will generate a list of responses. Look for patterns. Is there anything that emerges from the list, grabs attention, or sparks interest? These are the pieces to continue exploring with the group.

One of the biggest ‘hang-ups’ in these exercises is the terminology that is used for the process. Sometimes the words *vision, mission, purpose, core values, etc.*, carry too much weight with them, causing churches to get too bogged down. Maybe *goals* is a better place to start – or even *objectives* or *focus areas*. Whatever word is least complicated for the group, go with it. Regardless of the name we use, the point of the exercise is the same: pick a direction – and put all of your energy and resources into it. Nothing else gets a place at the table.

That direction can be as long-term or as short-term as necessary – and it can be revisited fairly often and pretty easily, if needed. As Christians, we are to constantly seek what God is calling us to do *right now*, in *this* moment, in *this* context. Once we identify that call, then we need to work toward it with everything we’ve got.

When we stay in tune with God’s call in the life of our congregations, God will bless our efforts and our churches will continue to be the Light of Christ in the world.

1. These questions are examples of what is called Appreciative Inquiry (AI), which is a process of asking the congregation what they like most about their church. For more information on this process or how to use it, please send an email to [revmarji19@gmail.com](mailto:revmarji19@gmail.com) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)