

02-100 RECOMMENDATION

The Presbyterian Mission Agency Board recommends that the 224th General Assembly (2020) approve Part 1 of the 2021–2022 Mission Work Plan for the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

The 2021–2022 Mission Work Plan (Part 1)

Executive Summary

The Manual of Operations and Organization of the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) states “the primary purpose of the Presbyterian Mission Agency is to lead and coordinate the total mission program.” In fulfilling its purpose, the Presbyterian Mission Agency develops and proposes a Mission Work Plan (MWP) for General Assembly approval. The MWP reflects the mission directions, goals, objectives and priorities of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, considering the mission work being done by sessions, presbyteries, and synods. The nature of overtures submitted to the General Assembly for the past decade were also considered in the development of the priorities for the 2021–2022 MWP.

In keeping with the Manual of Operations, in September 2019, the PMA Board directed the President/Executive Director of the PMA to create a proposed 2021–2022 MWP. The Mission Work Plan outlined in this document contains such a plan. After reviewing the nature of overtures sent to the General Assembly within the past decade, and upon the advice and direction coming from mid council leaders attending a meeting called by the PMA Board of Directors a decision on mission priorities is being made. The PMA recommendation to the General Assembly is that the priorities for the 2021–2022 MWP remain the same as the priorities for 2019–2020. The three priorities are:

- Building Congregational Vitality
- Dismantling Structural Racism
- Eradicating Systemic Poverty

Building congregational vitality refers to the intentional and continuous faith development of pastors, ruling elders, and members of a congregation that leads disciples who are members of a church to actively engage with their community and to make new disciples as a result of their witness and work.

The PMA’s work in congregational vitality for 2021–2022 will be focused on the following outcomes:

- Loving neighbor: Congregations exhibit ministries of justice, compassion and service in witness to Jesus Christ.
- Loving God: Congregations exhibit ministries of teaching, nurture and vibrant worship that attracts new disciples or “those yet to come” to faith in Christ.
- Loving one another: Congregations engage in mutual relationship of learning and leading, accompanying partnership that demonstrates a quality of life rooted in faith.

Dismantling structural racism involves breaking down the laws, policies, practices, and structures that reinforce and perpetuate discrimination, bias, prejudice, and oppression of people of color.

The PMA's work in the area of racism for 2021–2022 will focus on these four outcomes:

- Working with mid councils and congregations: Presbyterians will have antiracism training as well as cultural humility skills.
- Working with white Presbyterians: White Presbyterians will become aware of white privilege in the church and in society and how they may advocate for a more just and peaceable world.
- Working in society: Presbyterians will lead in antiracism work.
- Working within the Presbyterian Mission Agency: Staff of color can be their authentic cultural selves in every setting.

Eradicating systemic poverty refers to the elimination of the economic exploitation of impoverished people through laws, policies, practices and systems that perpetuate an impoverished state.

The PMA's work in poverty for 2021–2022 will focus on these five outcomes:

- Presbyterians understand a biblical and theological framework for dismantling poverty.
- Presbyterians have genuine, equitable, and non-paternalistic relationships with and learn from people who struggle with poverty.
- Presbyterians understand the intersectional, root causes of poverty and racism.
- Presbyterians participate in advocacy toward dismantling poverty.
- Presbyterians be generous in supporting efforts to lift communities out of poverty.

The theological and biblical basis for the three priorities comes from the Gospel of Matthew 25:31–46. In this passage of Scripture, Jesus judges the nations by how they respond to “the least of these”— people experiencing hunger, thirst, nakedness, sickness, and imprisonment, as well as strangers in need of welcome. The least of these are the beloved of Jesus. The least of these are people who live on the margins of society and have the least access to the justice and mercy that Jesus expects believers to demonstrate. The least of these are not judged for the condition; rather, the nations are judged for their refusal to respond to them.

The 222nd General Assembly (2016) called for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be “Matthew 25 people.” The Presbyterian Mission Agency now lifts the vision of Matthew 25, which calls for faithful followers of Jesus to actively engage in the world, responding with compassion and justice toward the least of these. This response of compassion and justice toward the most marginalized folks in our world is not only to be made by individuals, but the nations in which we live. Thus, the Matthew 25 vision is one that aligns with the three priorities of building congregational vitality, eradicating systemic poverty and dismantling structural racism.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Mission Agency
Mission Work Plan 2021–2022

Introduction

In September 2019, the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board directed the President/Executive Director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency to create a proposed 2021–2022 Mission Work Plan (MWP) using the following priorities as a framework:

- Building Congregational Vitality
- Dismantling Structural Racism
- Eradicating Systemic Poverty

These priorities are the same for the 2019–2020 MWP. The MWP reflects the mission directions, goals, objectives, and priorities of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, and is created in consideration of the mission work being done by sessions, presbyteries, and synods. In the development of the priorities of this 2021–2022 MWP, the nature of overtures submitted to the General Assembly for the past decade were considered. Finally, the decision to continue with the same priorities of building congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism, and eradicating systemic poverty into the 2021–2022 MWP came through a consultation with mid council leaders who were called together by the PMA Board in August 2019 to discuss mission priorities. Given the time it takes to embed a vision throughout the denomination, extending the work on these priorities gives the church an opportunity to develop and work toward fulfilling them. The three foci now constitute the basis for the Matthew 25 vision, which was launched by the Presbyterian Mission Agency in April 2019 and continues to be shared with the denomination today.

Theological Framework

The tenets of the Matthew 25 vision are embedded in our denomination’s spiritual DNA. The Presbyterian and Reformed tradition is marked by a deep concern for the flourishing of all people. Our confessions make this clear. For instance, the Confession of 1967 condemns the evil of systemic poverty in our world. The Confession of Belhar challenges us to confront racism in the Church and society. A Brief Statement of Faith imagines congregations fully alive in the glory of God. The vision of Matthew 25, which emphasizes congregational vitality, racism, and poverty, aligns with the beliefs and confessions of the PC(USA). It is offered, above all, for the sake of the whole world God loves.

The PMA believes the Matthew 25 vision will help the PC(USA) in three ways: to connect, clarify, and celebrate. First, the Matthew 25 vision allows us to connect with other Presbyterians throughout this nation and with partners in mission around the world, providing a common language to articulate our ministry in Jesus’ name. Second, the Matthew 25 vision enables us to clarify our self-understanding, so we can begin to live out our calling as followers of Jesus to make disciples, teaching folks to share the love and justice of God among those who are most marginalized. Third, being a part of the Matthew 25 vision is a way to celebrate the witness and work that unites us as followers of Christ in the PC(USA), a vision large enough to embrace us all, yet specific enough to respond to the needs of local communities.

The framework for this MWP is centered on Matthew 25:31–46, which was a mandate of the 222nd General Assembly (2016). Matthew 25 provides a theological and biblical framework for our emphasis on building congregational vitality, eradicating systemic poverty, and dismantling structural racism. The mandate came to the General Assembly from the Presbytery of the Cascades, with concurrences from five presbyteries, including Hudson River, Long Island, Monmouth, National Capital, and Sheppards and Lapsley. The rationale for the overture said:

This is a moment of great opportunity for our church. Momentum is building within our denomination and throughout our society to courageously confront the challenges of our time. A new civil rights movement, a new peace movement, a new economic justice movement is on the rise and we are in a position to stand in solidarity with the poor in a uniquely powerful way. It is a time for us to define who we will be for decades to come. May we choose to be a church committed to the gospel of Matthew 25. (*Minutes*, 2016, Part I, pp. 700–701)

The Presbyterian Mission Agency wholeheartedly embraces this call and, on behalf of the General Assembly, invites other parts of the church to join in God’s mission.

The themes of Matthew 25 are grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 25:31–46, the story of the sheep and goats, Jesus calls us to serve with and for “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40)—not as a group to be pitied, but as people who are deeply loved by Jesus. The fact is the least of these are not being judged in this Scripture. It is those who withhold resources who receive severe judgment. Thus, it is not the least of these who are to be pitied, but those who fail to respond to them with compassion, justice, and mercy. The least of these de-center our assumptions about what it means to be a beloved child of God. In this passage of Scripture, Jesus issues a challenge to the authenticity of discipleship, which is demonstrated in how the sheep and goat respond to the least of these. The disciples mandate to hear and do the Word of God stated in Matthew 7:24, which is underscored again in Matthew 25:31–46. Jesus makes it clear that his followers must display compassion toward those in need. Furthermore, given that Jesus is judging nations in his story of the sheep and goats, the commitment of believers to advocate and develop systems that demonstrate compassion toward those most in need also becomes apparent. To put it simply, in Matthew 25 we see the importance of being the people of God and doing the work God calls us to do.

Matthew 25 reminds us of the life of Jesus in which we learn how God actively engages the world, challenging systems that hurt and take away the hope of God’s people. We accept Jesus’ call to respond to the suffering of those around us because we believe who he is and what he stands for. This call to create a more just and peaceable world is not easy. It may be difficult to make the least of these central to our ministry. Moreover, speaking truth to power and creating more compassionate systems can involve suffering and heartache. It did for Jesus, so it will be for his followers. Yet, the blessings pronounced by Jesus upon those who hear and do God’s word compel us to do this work, perhaps because believers know and have already experienced Christ’s work in us. By focusing on building congregational vitality, dismantling racism and eradicating poverty, the Presbyterian Mission Agency seeks to lead the PC(USA) in being faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

Building congregational vitality refers to the intentional and continuous faith development of pastors, ruling elders, and members of a congregation that leads disciples who are members in a church to actively engage with their community and to make new disciples as a result of their witness and work. The source of vitality and energy is rooted in Jesus and comes through the

Holy Spirit at work in the life of believers who labor in the church and in the world, meeting the needs of the poor and “the least of these” as demonstrated by the sheep in Matthew 25:31–46. Both the sheep and goats do not recognize Jesus in the face of the hungry, thirsty, naked, stranger, sick, and imprisoned, yet the sheep respond to such people with compassion, bearing witness to the vitality, character, and charisma of Christ present in them.

Congregational vitality, as the PMA defines it, is not solely determined by the size of a church or its budget. It is more concerned with a church’s faithfulness in demonstrating the love and justice of Jesus. It is directly related to the vitality of faith exuded in believers who trust in Jesus and are committed to carrying out his mission in the world.

This vision of vital congregations in which believers actively engage in the world is underscored in Scripture and can be seen in the actions of the 220th General Assembly (2012)’s report regarding the role of congregations in the world. The report states:

Regarding Living Out Our Faith Publicly

1. Call on the PC(USA) to focus its ministry and resources on the society-at-large and to mobilize its agencies/entities, councils, congregations, and members/disciples to reach out holistically with the Gospel of Jesus Christ to participate in God’s just peace and sociopolitical transformation.
2. Call on the PC(USA) to mobilize our agencies/entities, councils, congregations, and members/disciples to prayerfully discern afresh where and how God is calling the whole church to live out our faith.
3. Call on pastors, sessions, and Christian educators to equip Presbyterians to live out their Christian faith publicly through their various social roles and spheres of influence in practical demonstration of the love and teachings of Jesus, in concrete ways (as citizens, consumers, family, and individuals). Our budgets and programs must reflect our commitment to mission and focusing outwardly.
4. Call on local pastors, sessions, and congregations to engage in hands-on ministry outside the walls of their buildings and in their neighborhoods.

The church bears witness to faith in Christ when congregations actively engage in the world, providing a compassionate response to people in need and becoming involved in correcting the injustice that leads to the marginalization of such people. Active engagement in the world also allows the church to expand its influence and to create new disciples from those who benefit from the congregation’s involvement in the community. One good test of a congregation’s vitality is to see how its members and neighbors answer the question, “If this church were to close, who would miss it and why?” Congregational vitality is aligned with the words of Jesus, who calls us to “go and make disciples of all nations.”

The PMA’s work in congregational vitality will be focused on the following outcomes:

- Loving neighbor: Congregations exhibit ministries of justice, compassion, and service in witness to Jesus Christ.
- Loving God: Congregations exhibit ministries of teaching, nurture, and vibrant worship that attracts new disciples or “those yet to come” to faith in Christ.

- Loving one another: Congregations engage in mutual relationship of learning and leading, accompanying partnership that demonstrates a quality of life rooted in faith.

Dismantling structural racism involves breaking down the laws, policies, practices, and structures that reinforce and perpetuate discrimination, bias, prejudice, and oppression of black people and other people of color.

While racism did not exist in the early Church as it does today, the teaching of Matthew 25 reveals God’s concern for people who are poor and marginalized. In this nation, people of color suffer a disproportionate level of poverty. As documented in books such as Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*, bell hooks’ *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*, and Ibram X. Kendi’s *Stamped from the Beginning*, racism remains an impediment to equity and justice in this country for African Americans and other people of color to this day. The documented disparities with African Americans and other people of color in every area—including housing, education, employment, health, immigration, and incarceration—are indicative of institutional injustice. White Americana still fares better than blacks and other people of color in the same positions and circumstances. The advantage of whites over blacks and people of color, given the same circumstance, is commonly referred to as “white privilege.”

Racism and white privilege are sin, violating the truth that all people are created in the image of God. This sin results in fear, violence, neglect, and destruction of God’s people and must be dismantled. The 222nd General Assembly (2016) reaffirmed the PC(USA)’s stance on the issue of racism in the adoption of the Confession of Belhar, which states in part:

We believe ... that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God’s Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain;

[We believe] ... that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted; (*Book of Confessions*, 10.3)

We believe... that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity. (*Book of Confessions*, 10.5)

The 222nd General Assembly (2016) also approved the following antiracism policy:

The Bible insistently reveals that God loves diversity and justice. This is seen in the wide variety of creation in which God delights. It is heard in the words of the prophets, who reject oppression and commend justice as true worship. It is embodied in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, who resists the power of empire and values all persons, regardless of status, as children of God. Jesus gathered a community of people around him that crossed over every social and cultural boundary. ...

Racism is the opposite of what God intends for humanity. It is the rejection of the other, which is entirely contrary to the Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ. It is a form of idolatry that

elevates human-made hierarchies of value over divinely given free grace. Through colonization and slavery, the United States of America helped to create and embrace a system of valuing and devaluing people based on skin color and ethnic identity. The name for this system is white supremacy. This system deliberately subjugated groups of people for the purpose of material, political and social advantage. Racism is the continuing legacy of white supremacy. Racism is a lie about our fellow human beings, for it says that some are less than others. It is also a lie about God, for it falsely claims that God favors parts of creation over the entirety of creation.

Because of our biblical understanding of who God is and what God intends for humanity, the PC(USA) must stand against, speak against and work against racism. Antiracist effort is not optional for Christians. It is an essential aspect of Christian discipleship, without which we fail to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. (*Minutes*, 2016, Part I, p, 772)

In Matthew 25, Jesus' judgment of nations underscores the importance of developing disciples who respond to the condition of "the least of these." When a nation's system of laws and governance are biased against black people and other people of color, new systems that demonstrate the compassion and justice of God toward all are required. Matthew 25 provides a theological and biblical basis for the dismantling of structural racism as a system that is indifferent to those in need of the love, justice and liberation offered in Jesus Christ.

The PMA's work in the area of racism will focus on these four outcomes:

- Working with mid councils and congregations: Presbyterians will have antiracism training as well as cultural humility skills.
- Working with white Presbyterians: White Presbyterians will become aware of white privilege in the church and in society and learn how they may advocate for a more just and peaceable world.
- Working in society: Presbyterians will lead in antiracism work.
- Working within the Presbyterian Mission Agency: Staff of color can be their authentic cultural selves in every setting.

Eradicating systemic poverty refers to the elimination of the economic exploitation of impoverished people through laws, policies, practices, and systems that perpetuate an impoverished state.

Addressing systemic poverty includes the important acts of compassion listed in Matthew 25. However, eradicating systemic poverty moves beyond compassionate acts to the confrontation of systems that create and perpetuate poverty. For while it is important to serve a meal to people who are hungry, the deeper issue is why a person is without food. The Presbyterian concern for addressing the root causes of poverty is demonstrated in the establishment of such ministries as Self-Development of People, which came into being fifty years ago. Poverty also intersects with other issues, such as racism and discrimination in gender, sexual identity, age, citizenship, and immigration status. In Matthew 25:31–46, Jesus makes it clear that he is present with people who are poor and marginalized. He expects no less from his followers.

The 222nd General Assembly (2016) called on the church to:

Recommit ourselves at the congregational level, the mid council level, and the national levels of our Church to locate ourselves with the poor, to advocate with all of our voice for the poor, and

to seek opportunities to take risks for and with the poor (in the soup kitchens and catholic worker houses, among the immigrants, with those working to end mass incarceration, and with those who seek to protect all of us, especially the poorest of the poor around the world, from the vagaries of climate change). (*Minutes*, 2016, Part I, p. 700)

The PMA seeks to lead the church in eradicating systems that perpetuate poverty and instead ministering with compassion to those in need of God’s love.

The PMA’s work with respect to poverty will focus on these five outcomes:

- Presbyterians understand a biblical and theological framework for dismantling poverty.
- Presbyterians have genuine, equitable, and non-paternalistic relationships with and learn from people who struggle with poverty.
- Presbyterians understand the intersectional, root causes of poverty and racism.
- Presbyterians participate in advocacy toward dismantling poverty.
- Presbyterians are generous in supporting efforts to lift communities out of poverty.

The rationale section of the overture, which is a plea to the church to stand with people who are poor, is no less urgent today:

We see the Spirit blowing through our society, bringing to fruition seeds of peace and justice long dormant. The harvest will be plentiful. Let us heed the call to service and recommit ourselves to the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in deeds as well as in words. (*Minutes*, 2016, Part I, p. 701)

As a benediction and charge for this theological framework, hear these “Beatitudes for a Matthew 25 Church” from the “Worship in a Matthew 25 Church: Resources for Congregations and Presbyteries” booklet:

“Beatitudes for a Matthew 25 Church”

Systemic Poverty

Blessed are those who serve the poor,

they will be called the children of God.

Blessed are those who share the wealth,

they will be called the children of God.

Blessed are those who work for good,

they will be called the children of God.

Structural Racism

Blessed are those who open doors,

they will be called the children of God.

Blessed are those who break down walls,

they will be called the children of God.

Blessed are those who challenge hate,

they will be called the children of God.

Congregational Vitality

Blessed are those who live their faith,

they will be called the children of God.

Blessed are those who speak the truth,

they will be called the children of God.

Blessed are those who show Christ's love,

they will be called the children of God.

Mission Engagement and Support

Becoming a Matthew 25 Church with its foci of building congregational vitality, eradicating systemic poverty, and dismantling structural racism guides the PMA's plan for mission engagement and support. As Presbyterians are informed, inspired, and engaged by the Matthew 25 vision, they will be more apt to support the work of the PC(USA) with faithful stewardship. Stewardship pertains to how we manage and share the gifts entrusted to us. It includes the gifts of faith, prayer, labor, and service to God. Indeed, the vitality and impact of the church's mission is driven by the developing faith of disciples and their generous donation of time, skills, and social networks shared with the church. Stewardship also includes the management of financial resources to support the work of the church.

Clarity of vision impacts the financial provision given to any entity, including the church. People want to know why they are giving and what their gifts will accomplish. Matthew 25 calls believers to re-present Christ and actively engage in the world by serving "the least of these." It compels believers in our denomination and beyond to see Jesus in the face of the hungry, thirsty, and naked. Matthew 25 challenges us to love our neighbor, continually reaching out and taking risks to serve them. The gifts that support our denomination, *at every level*, allow us to build ministries, meet the needs of our communities and reach out to the world with the good news of Jesus Christ. But that is only part of the picture. Taking risks and moving beyond our comfort zone are important ways to increase our faith.

Already, by the grace of God, the national level of our church receives an outpouring of generosity in financial gifts. As the PMA allocates those gifts, we are living out of a renewed sense of gratitude, energy, intelligence, imagination, and love. The identity, hope, and partnership with God in the PC(USA) is being revitalized. Faithful stewardship of those gifts—the receiving, managing, allocating, and interpreting the use of those gifts—is part of our individual and institutional transformation. The gifts entrusted to us become a tangible expression of the work of the Body of Christ that is Presbyterian. We are claimed by God and we have the responsibility to partner with God in the transformation of the world.

The *Book of Order* tells us:

The funding of mission ... demonstrates the unity and interdependence of the church. The failure of any part of the church to participate in the stewardship of the mission of the whole church

diminishes that unity and interdependence. All mission funding should enable the church to give effective witness in the world to God's new creation in Jesus Christ and should strengthen the church's witness to the mission of God. (G-3.0106)

Scripture tells us: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21, New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])

[Note: The budget section of this document (to come in April 2020) will include focused revenue targets that will be necessary to accomplish this plan.]

As partners in God's mission, the Presbyterian Mission Agency will engage the church in the following ways:

- An annual publication that reports how gifts are used for both the mission and the administration of the PC(USA). The report will include a thank you for past support and a solicitation for future support of Shared Mission, Special Offerings, and Per Capita, as well as a report on giving for congregations and mid councils.
- A quarterly "Interpretation and Stewardship" packet sent to all congregations.
- A Congregational Leaders Guide and support materials for all four Special Offerings including Minutes for Mission—mailed to all congregations with standing orders.
- Recognition of "4 for 4 Congregations" (those who support all four Special Offerings) when mission engagement advisors attend presbytery meetings and ask for support of all congregations.
- Quarterly updates on giving to Special Offerings sent to all presbyteries and congregations (this is a well-established current practice).
- An annual personal call (either in person or by phone) with every mid council leader.
- Attending as many mid council meetings as possible, asking for agenda time to bring greetings and staffing an exhibit table if possible.
- Distributing mission interpretation and materials for Matthew 25.
- Outreach calls to thank churches and individuals for their support of Presbyterian Mission, including Special Offerings.
- Outreach calls to engage with congregations who have lapsed in support for Special Offerings.
- Calls to cultivate and equip church leaders to interpret the mission of the church.

Mission engagement at regional/national events:

- The presence of and support by staff at all national conferences/events. This may include bringing greetings, providing a presentation/workshop, hosting a gathering, supporting PMA leadership/program staff, and providing information folders, etc., as well as an ask for support of Presbyterian Mission.
- The processing, recording, and acknowledgement of all gifts in support of Presbyterian Mission.
- Attending and presenting at Mission Network Meetings.

Mission engagement with individuals:

- Direct mail solicitations that invite financial support of the mission priorities of the church.
- Interpretation of the church's mission and effectiveness through the Presbyterian Giving Catalog.
- The processing, recording, and acknowledgment of all gifts in support of Presbyterian Mission.