

Ministries Analysis

While long-term planning is critical to the health of any organization, too often it receives little attention from sessions and congregations. This neglect has been exacerbated in recent years as churches find themselves increasingly challenged to do more with less. When these immediate challenges demand our attention now, the less-urgent matter of long-term planning gets pushed to the back burner.

The Mission Study in general, and the Ministries Analysis in particular, provides a helpful framework for engaging in that long-term planning. The analyses recommended below have been found to be useful in helping the MST and the congregation to pull back from a narrow focus on the immediate and to see a broader picture. They accomplish this not only by documenting trends, but also by exploring current policies and practices with new eyes and determining whether they remain clear and relevant today, and whether they provide sufficient guidance for future planning and contingencies.

Whenever possible, the MST should gather data from the past five to ten years. The more data you have, the likelier you will be able to discern trends. Some of the items below may not apply to your church. You may decide that they aren't relevant – but you may also determine that they are relevant, in which case you would note in your Recommendations that the congregation pay attention to this area.

Yes, this is a lot of data. But as the MST gathers and analyzes it, they will gain a much fuller and more nuanced understanding of the church than any individual. That understanding will provide a solid foundation for the recommendations it will make in its report.

Charts and Graphs – Charts and graphs are often clearer and more powerful means of conveying information, particularly when measuring trends. Excel has some robust graphing capabilities, and the MST should make use of this resource. Note also that if a chart or graph shows a significant anomaly one year, it can be helpful to offer an explanation alongside – e.g., if revenue doubled one year because of a gift, you might write, “Gift received from the estate of John Calvin.”

Administration

- How this ministry has contributed to the mission of the church
- Staffing ratios over time (staff members: worshippers)
- Size of Staff, Session, Diaconate
- Other information specific to your church's administration ministry

Congregational History & Trends (see footnote)

- Reported membership
- Reported worship attendance¹
- Reported involvement in church ministries outside worship
- Demographics (age, gender, race)
- Moments / events where the congregation recognized the activity of the Holy Spirit
- Accomplishments and milestones that were (or should have been) celebrated
- Significant trauma and losses
- Conflicts and crises in the church
- How the church (particularly leadership) responded
 - Whether that response was sufficient and/or faithful, and/or whether “skeletons” remain unaddressed
 - How those historical events have impacted the church’s sense of identity and calling
- Pastors and Pastoral Transitions, including how they affected the congregation
- Relationship with presbytery, including
 - Participation in presbytery committees and ministries
 - Financial support (both ways)
- Relationship with PCUSA, including
 - Participation in denominational committees and ministries
 - Congregation’s responses to “hot-button” denominational issues

Christian Education / Discipleship

- How this ministry has contributed to the mission of the church
- Notable events in the lives and faith of church members
- Confirmation Class enrollment (total and as a percentage of attenders/members)

¹ Much of this data can be pulled straight from the Clerk of Session’s Annual Report to the denomination. If these are unavailable for reason, much of the information can be accessed online at <https://church-trends.pcusa.org/church/search/>. Obviously the pandemic throws a monkey wrench into both the relevance and the reliability of many of these numbers. We recommend you go back to Jan 1, 2016 to get several years of pandemic-free data. Data from the beginning of 2022 may also be helpful. Data from 2020 and 2021 may be helpful, or may not – it’s the MST’s prerogative to determine what it shall include. The report should include a brief explanation of how you treated data from this period and the reasoning behind your decision.

- Sunday School enrollment
- VBS enrollment
- Curricula across age groups
 - What curricula has Session approved and what classes have been taught?
 - Have certain areas been emphasized or neglected?
 - Looking at elementary, youth, and adult education: Does it appear that the church tries to provide a “general” education, or is instruction and subject matter organized within a framework that specifically plans for growth? If the later, how is that plan presented, and how does the church measure its effectiveness?

Deacons

- Accomplishments, changes in size or responsibilities, challenges, and how their ministry has contributed to the mission of the church

Fellowship

- In some congregations this ministry is responsible for planning events (or even running the kitchen) and helping introduce new members to the congregation.
- If your church does not have deacons, this ministry may oversee congregational care.
- While all ministries were affected by the pandemic, this one seems to have recovered more slowly than others. Explore how your ministries under this heading contribute to the church’s mission, how they were affected by the pandemic, and how they have recovered in the aftermath.

Finance (/ Stewardship)

- How this ministry has contributed to the mission of the church
- Budgets and Spending
 - Document overall budgets, revenue and spending for at least the past five years, ten if available.
 - On the revenue side, break out pledges, gifts and any other significant sources. Show how much each category has contributed to overall revenue by percentage, and graph the trends over time.
 - On the expense side, break out personnel costs, property/maintenance, and benevolences. Show how much each category has contributed to overall revenue by percentage, and graph the trends over time.

- It may be helpful to break out technology costs and trends
- Stewardship
 - If not part of the Finance ministry, explain its role and authority, and how it contributes to the mission of the church
- Endowment
 - How the Endowment has contributed to the mission of the church
 - Document annual revenue and outlays, and show trends over time
 - Of particular importance is the function of the endowment. Regrettably, it is not uncommon in churches with an endowment to be less than transparent about *how* endowment funds may or should be used.
 - Does your endowment have a policy manual? How frequently is it reviewed?
 - Is the endowment managed by the Finance committee, or a separate entity? If separate, how are they appointed or elected? Who is eligible to serve? What information do they provide to Session, and how frequently?
 - Does policy require the preservation of principal? Is the amount of principal to be adjusted for inflation, and if so, according to what formula?
 - Does it specify how monies shall be used? E.g., are funds only to be used for mission? Who determines which missions will be funded?
 - How about capital outlays, or major repairs?
 - Can the endowment supplement the church's operating budget? If so, what policies govern that use?
 - Are there any provisions for major contingencies, such as loss of buildings/property due to fire/flood? What happens if congregational giving decreases to the point where it will no longer sustain the church's ministries? Or even their legal obligations (mortgage, utilities, etc.)?
 - Does the committee that manages the endowment have sole authority to approve the expenditure of funds? Or, e.g., does a disbursement above a certain level (like \$10,000) also require session approval?

Mission / Outreach

- How this ministry has contributed to the mission of the church
- Notable changes, events, communities served
- Benevolences and Activities
 - If the church does not have an endowment dedicated to supporting mission, this committee might be the entity that decides which ministries the church supports and how much it will give. See the **Endowment** bullet (above) for questions concerning these activities.

Property

- How this ministry has contributed to the mission of the church
- Maintenance and repairs
 - Items of significance over the past ten years
 - Which items will require attention in the next ten years
 - Include estimated costs
 - Impending end-of-life dates for major equipment
- Capital improvements
 - Completed over the past ten years, at what cost
 - Evaluate whether these improvements have fulfilled their intended purpose, and have been worth the expense
 - Planned for the next ten years, and at what cost
- Building usage
 - By congregation
 - By community
 - As with the endowment, many congregations are unclear about the values surrounding the community's use of church buildings. Does the church see its buildings primarily as an opportunity generate revenue? Or does it see them primarily as a means of ministry to the community? There is no "right" answer. What's important is that these values and priorities be agreed upon by session and clearly communicated to the congregation. In coming years church building & property use by the community will become increasingly relevant options in the lives of congregations. It's critical that, **before** conversations begin on these matters, everyone understands what priorities are guiding the decisions. Revenue generation?

Community Mission? Witness? The church must have a “baseline” against which to measure its decisions concerning the stewardship of its assets. And it must then honor that baseline in practice.

Session

- Accomplishments, changes in size or responsibilities, challenges, and how their ministry has contributed to the mission of the church
- It is recommended that the MST thoroughly review the Book of Order guidance for the Session. (You might ask your Interim Pastor or POJ representative to assist in this). This guidance can be found in sections G-2.03, G-3.01 and G-3.02.
 - Evaluate Session’s activity in light of the Book of Order guidance.

Technology

- How this ministry has contributed to the mission of the church
 - The answer to this question will probably have changed rapidly over the past ten years.
- Infrastructure
- How current is software? Will it need updating soon?
- Info Security? IT support / review & update contracts
- WiFi – does it support current usage? Can it support future growth?
- Cloud usage, staff coordination, maintenance, security, updating
- How broadly is technology utilized? How familiar are leaders with how to use it?
- Church Website
 - Who maintains? Who has access? Is the design current?
 - Ask several outsiders from different generations to review the desktop site and the mobile site for user-friendliness
- Social Media Presence
 - Who maintains? Who has access? Is the church using current media streams?
 - Ask several outsiders from different generations to review the church’s presence on various media streams and give you feedback

Worship

- How this ministry has contributed to the mission of the church
- Notable changes – worship times, number of services, holiday/special day services

- Any *documented* conversations/discussions on the nature of worship (style, length, leadership, music) – try to avoid unsupported anecdotes
- Choir, bells, other?
- Leadership (lay, pastoral, musical, other)
- Live-streaming capability
- Quality of audio and video feeds and recordings
- Ushers