

# Paradigms for Mission Renewal

What if the biggest challenges we face in the work of mission renewal are adaptive ones, not technical ones? What if we don't need to figure out a better way to do what we've always done, we need to figure out a new way to be who and what God is calling us to be? As congregations move forward, it is helpful to consider a series of paradigm shifts. Here is a concrete way of imagining the breadth and depth of renewal.

## Old Paradigm

**Church** is a place assumed to be an important part of people's lives and the world. Therefore, we expect people to want to be part of a congregation.

The **congregation** is an organization focused on serving its members. Membership is how one belongs to the congregation and how it belongs to you.

**Ministry** is done through programs. Programs address perceived problems (e.g., "We don't have youth; we need youth ministry.") and are directed by Staff.

**Outreach** is about doing nice things for others. **Evangelism** is about getting new members, because more members means more money, and more money means we can keep doing what we've always done.

**Worship** is about expressing praise to God in a comfortable setting; it's also about fulfilling a religious obligation.

**Christian Education** is about learning the Bible and passing on denominational traditions. But it's optional.

**Congregational Life/Fellowship** really means "social committee." It's about coffee hour and potluck dinners.

**Stewardship/Finance** are essentially the same thing; it's about how we're going to keep the lights on.

**Lay Leaders** serve out of duty; it's about whose turn it is to serve on council. **Pastors** work hard, trying to give people what they want. They are busy meeting needs, solving problems, and answering questions.

**Decisions** are made by the leaders. Council delegates day to day tasks and programs to staff. The congregation votes on major things once or twice per year.

## New Paradigm

**Church** is a community gathered by the Spirit and blessed to be a blessing. Church is less a noun, more a verb; less a place, more a way of life and an instrument of God's mission in the world.

The **congregation** is a mission outpost and is therefore focused on serving its mission field (i.e., the neighborhood, city, and world).

**Ministry** is about vocation. Vocation is living out the spiritual gifts given to us in baptism. Vocation happens in relationships. We are a priesthood of all believers.

**Outreach** is a combination of service, advocacy, and relationship building. **Evangelism** is about sharing our faith stories in spiritual friendships.

**Worship** imagines a world. Worship shapes us into the kind of people God is calling us to become. Liturgy is the "work of the people" and so it is diverse and contextual.

**Christian Education** is about making disciples of Jesus. It is centered on faith practices in the home, workplace, and together at church.

**Congregational Life** is about creating a culture of hospitality, service, discipleship, and prayer within the congregation. It's our collective spirituality.

**Stewardship** is about how we are using all the resources God has given us. **Finance** is about aligning our money with our mission priorities.

**Congregational Leadership** is a dynamic partnership between clergy and lay leaders that cultivates a new environment that fosters missional creativity. Leaders work together to ask the right questions, invite others to serve, and love people into a new way of being church.

**Decisions** are made through spiritual discernment. The more participants in a decision-making process, the wiser it will be. Council and staff are lead-learners.

This resource was developed for congregational use. Please use freely! The compilers also welcomes questions, further conversation, and feedback:

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