

Could it be that God has a preferred and promised future for your church?

Are you open to the possibility that Christ Jesus is sending you to people outside your congregation to become part of what God is doing in the world?

Like the disciples of John 20 huddled together in the upper room, some churches find themselves isolated, fearful and holding on to one another. They are hungry for some sign that Jesus is with them and God has a future for them.

Some churches are stable and have the resources to keep going as they are but have the sense that the world is changing and their ministry is losing its relevance and effectiveness. They are looking for ways to form disciples who live their lives and do ministry at the intersection of the Gospel and the changing complexion and complexities of their community.

There are even some churches that are growing, active and engaged but wonder whether they are dissipating their energy and missing the mark by just adding more and more — more ministries and more staff. They hope to discover their unique call within God's mission in the world that will focus their gifts, extend their reach and deepen their impact.

All these types of churches have found what they were looking for and more in the Partnership for Missional Church.

PMC is a journey of discernment not a program because each church has its own character and calling. While the spiritual practices the congregations learn for Listening, Experimenting and Focusing are all the same- the places they are sent, the partners they find and their role in God's mission are unique. This is neither a franchise nor an imitation of others. It is the work of the Holy Spirit which blows where it will. But blow it does and through the Partnership for Missional Church churches learn to hoist their sails and catch the wind of the Spirit.

Are you ready to prayerfully consider whether God is inviting you and your church into such a journey?

The Partnership for Missional Church is a three year journey of spiritual discernment in which clusters of 12-16 churches learn how to be part of forming Christian community around God’s mission in the world.

The journey of PMC teaches churches spiritual practices that are important for missional discernment in three phases.

PHASE 1	LISTENING	<p>To God and the Word of God</p> <p>To one another</p> <p>To the strangers God is sending us to...</p>
PHASE 2	EXPERIMENTING	<p>In building bridge communities with the people God is sending us to...</p> <p>In partnering with others in God’s mission in the world.</p>
PHASE 3	FOCUSING	<p>Clarifying Missional Vocation and a Vision of God’s Future for the church</p> <p>Setting clear goals, objectives and plans that honor the church’s vocation and live into God’s future</p> <p>Letting go of distractions that dissipate energy and resources in too many directions.</p>

When churches complete the PMC journey they have a deeper understanding of the ways God is sending them in the community; they have discerned who God is sending them to; they have built relationships in the community and found ways to connect with God’s mission in those relationships; and captured those learnings in documents that say who they are, how they are sent and the future they believe God has for them. Each phase builds on the prior ones so PMC churches develop capacities in all these arenas which they continue to practice in the future.

Isn't this just another Strategic Planning Process?

Many churches have spent enormous amounts of money, energy and hope in developing strategic plans that sit on a shelf forgotten or adopting ministries that begin with great promise but slowly peter out over time. This is not because the plans or ministries are poorly designed. Every congregation's culture functions like your body's immune system. It maintains health by recognizing when something foreign has arrived and then isolates it so it can't infect the rest of the system. No matter how beneficial or helpful the plans and ministry may seem- since it is 'foreign'- developed by outside experts- the church's culture will unconsciously resist it.

That is why PMC utilizes a methodology of innovation from within the life of the congregation so the church cultivates its own way of being missional. As the church LISTENS to God (**Dwelling in the Word** and Spiritual Discernment), to one another and its neighbors it opens itself to imagine new possibilities. Then by structured MISSIONAL EXPERIMENTING it develops its own way of building relational bridges with the strangers (neighbors) God is sending them to and joining God's mission in that place. In this way the church has developed new missional practices that are becoming part of the church's culture and likely to last over time. This may sound as if there will be more and more to do while in fact PMC will get your congregation from longer lists to do to a shorter list with a compelling sense of the Spirit's leading.

Isn't this just another outreach program?

Typically outreach programs engage only a special interest group in the congregation and follow a "tell, do-for and invite" paradigm. The Partnership for Missional Church does neither.

Members of the congregation who are interested in mission and evangelism usually are interested in PMC because it does support their passions and dream for the church. But the Partnership does not emphasize mission at the price of worship, caring or educational ministries. These are not competing interests in God's economy. They are all facets of being the body of Christ. PMC instead frames all these ministries in light of how Christ has sent your church to be part of God's mission in the world with your neighbors.

Many devout, faithful and sincere Christians balk at outreach and evangelism because they do not want to be judgmental or critical of their neighbors. In fact that behavior seems contrary to the life and teaching of Jesus. Still it is clear the Gospel mandates proclamation and Jesus sent the Church to all nations. PMC follows what seems to be the way of the early church, "go, listen and do-with". As Newbegin points out, most of the great preaching moments in Acts were in response to questions from observers about the meaning of the apostles' actions. What would you think of evangelism if it were noticing what God is already doing for good in the world (in your community) and finding ways to be part of that with your neighbors?

What will PMC look like in our congregation?

The Steering Team is a small group responsible for leading and coordinating the PMC process in the local church throughout the three year journey. (Members are asked to make a commitment of at least 18 months- after which they can be replaced or renew their commitment.) There are numerous other short term roles for members of the congregation (eg Listening Leaders, Church Future Finder, and Missional Engagement Team). There are ways to involve individual members and existing groups in testing new ways of doing mission and ministry with your neighbors. Your church's governing body has an important role at various points in the journey to review what has been learned and discern the next step for your church. Each year there is a time for the entire congregation to become involved to discerning and celebrating what God has been and will be doing in the life of your church and the community. While the journey begins with a small group of adventurous souls the goal is to involve at least 20% of the congregation so what you learn becomes part of the congregation's life and culture. Throughout the journey a local Judicatory Support Person stays in touch with the Steering Team Leader to offer support and guidance each step of the way.

Three times a year the Steering Team, Spiritual Leaders and others from the church will meet with the teams from the other churches of their PMC cluster. They will gather for Friday evening and Saturday morning and afternoon. During this time PMC consultants and leaders from the sponsoring judicatory will provide biblical and practical training, guide reflection on what the teams have done and how God is working among them, and finally equip the local church teams for the real work they will be doing between cluster events.

The Spiritual Leaders of the church (ministers, priests, clergy, pastors, preachers etc) have a special role in PMC journey because even though they are not in charge of the process, they have a role to play in providing spiritual care and leadership. Too often the demands of the church's business get in the way of fulfilling this role, frustrating both members and the leaders themselves. PMC works to remedy this concern by providing the training and support every Friday of the cluster events that focuses on the spiritual life and role of these leaders in the PMC journey. They also receive personal spiritual support through regular phone calls from a trained Church Innovations consultant who is familiar with the PMC process and both the challenges and opportunities it creates.