

Gathering For God's Future



Witness, Discipleship, Community: A Renewed Call to Worldwide Mission



“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds ...”

Romans 12:2

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“With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us ... a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”

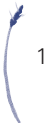
Ephesians 1:8-10

Mission: God-called, Christ-centered and Spirit-led

The Good News of Jesus Christ is to be shared with the whole world. As disciples of Jesus Christ, each of us in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is sent into the world to join God's mission. As individuals and as a church, we are called to be faithful in this discipleship. Our mission is centered in the triune God. Our mission is God-called, Christ-centered and Spirit-led. Our mission is both proclamation and service; it is the reason the church exists.

The blind see, the lame walk, hope is renewed, and faith is claimed and proclaimed by God's grace. A multitude who proclaim Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior name a Presbyterian from the United States as the one who first brought the Good News of Jesus Christ to them, their family, or their people. Whole communities are lifted out of poverty or brought back from catastrophic destruction because Presbyterians provide a witness to Christ that extends beyond measure.

We continue to pray and listen for God's guidance for mission to the whole world. The twenty-first century brings new challenges that arise from changes in the world, in the church, and in our denomination. Our renewed call from God is to face the challenges of witnessing and evangelizing worldwide, equipping the church for transforming mission, engaging in ministries of reconciliation, justice, healing and grace, and living the Good News of Jesus Christ in community with people who are poor. At the same time, further distinctive historic commitments shape the engagement and involvement of Presbyterians in mission as we rise to new challenges. These continuing commitments include joining in partnership, working ecumenically, developing leaders, connecting mission near and far, and sharing people and resources.





The Challenges We Face

Witnessing and Evangelizing Worldwide

We are challenged to respond to particular needs and opportunities in worldwide mission:

- ***Where there is a need to share the gospel for the first time.***

There are still people and cultures that have not yet heard the gospel of redemption and new life in Jesus Christ. We are called to offer the hope we find in Christ, to assist new disciples as they grow in faith and form a church led by their own leadership which is culturally relevant and independent of control by the sending mission church.

- ***Where witness to the gospel is endangered.***

Many parts of God's world are full of tension and uncertainty. The survival of Christians is at stake because of persecution, terror or migration. The deepening international crisis around issues of terrorism, the destiny of the Palestinian people, and relations between Islamic countries and the rest of the world remind us that Christian communities are often in danger. Our partners seek Presbyterian commitment and solidarity where their environment is perilous.

- ***Where the church is dealing with explosive growth.***

Christianity's "center of gravity" has shifted to the southern hemisphere. Churches in Africa, Latin America and Asia have experienced explosive growth. Some of this growth is in surprising places, where there has been recent oppression, war, or pandemic diseases. Partners in these countries are pressed to keep up with the demand for pastoral and lay leadership.

Equipping the Church for Transforming Mission

We are challenged:

- ***To become equipped as a church for transforming mission.***

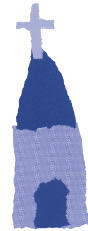
Noted missiologist David Bosch used the expression “transforming mission”¹ as a deliberately ambiguous term to describe the new era of mission in which we live. In his view, mission transforms the people who engage in it, mission transforms the world with which it engages, and mission itself undergoes transformation. Mission transforms persons, churches and societies.

- ***To become equipped to live out the call we receive in baptism to be part of the universal church of Jesus Christ.***

We are called to see ourselves as part of one mission society, with the opportunity to work together for faithful ministries around the world. We must continually grow in knowledge and understanding for mission.

- ***To equip one another.***

Sharing best practices, reporting our experiences and concerns, and developing tools for study and reflection to accompany mission involvements are all ways of equipping for transforming mission. Our mission is transformed when we gather Presbyterians with common mission interests together to form “mission networks.” What new tools will emerge? We trust God’s leading as we discern together how best to support and equip one another for transforming mission.



¹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts In Theology of Mission.*

Engaging in Ministries of Reconciliation, Justice, Healing and Grace

We are challenged to accept a ministry of reconciliation through the One who breaks down walls. This challenge calls Presbyterians to join with fellow Christians to seek the mind of Christ, and to join with fellow Christians and people of other faiths to work together for peace and wholeness for all people.

Presbyterians have a tradition of valuing ministries of compassion equally with ministries of proclamation, of working to nurture and empower people who are poor, disadvantaged and oppressed.

We do this by sharing God's love through:

- ***Ministries of reconciliation that build bridges between cultures.***
- ***Advocacy for women and children around the world, leading to vibrant economic development ministries, healthcare services, and educational opportunities for people who can make a difference in the health of their own communities.***
- ***Concern for all God's children through racial justice ministries, and in the development of new opportunities for all people who worship and serve in Christ's name.***



From education and leadership development to the founding of new churches, Presbyterians' many efforts to provide equal opportunities for all people are sorely needed.

Living the Good News of Jesus Christ in Community with People Who Are Poor



We are challenged to live the Good News of Jesus Christ in community with people who are poor, oppressed and disadvantaged. We learn and grow through mutually sharing the meaning of the gospel and living it with these brothers and sisters. This challenges us to:

- *Form relationships with people who are poor and learn from their communities.*
- *Equip all who are in mission relationships for the spiritual and practical challenges of the “wealth gap,” particularly avoiding dependencies.*
- *Study and reflect on wealth, its distribution, and the role of faith and the church in economic development and foreign policy.*
- *Share resources in ways that truly make a difference and a witness.*
- *Engage in mission with an attitude of humility, respect and compassion.*



How We Gather for God's Future: Presbyterian Commitments In Worldwide Mission

These challenges are large. These challenges demand our attention. Presbyterians' long mission history has led to an understanding that there are core commitments in our approach to mission. These are particularly fruitful when they are shaped to fit the realities of each time and place. The following commitments will guide Presbyterian mission.

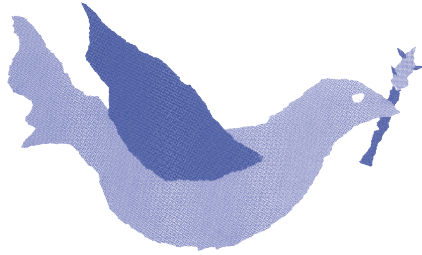
Joining in Partnership

Mission in the 1990s, the PC(USA)'s previous mission vision statement, affirmed "No amount of external funds or personnel can substitute for the effective witness of indigenous churches and believing communities in each nation to their own people's context... The body of believers in each nation has primary responsibility for mission and evangelism in that place."

The "Presbyterians Do Mission in Partnership" policy of the General Assembly guides us in honoring those insights, noting five distinct elements of "disciplined partnership:"

- Shared Grace and Thanksgiving
- Mutuality and Interdependence
- Recognition and Respect
- Open Dialogue and Transparency
- Sharing of Resources

Working in partnership is a demanding and rewarding calling. It requires humility and vulnerability to seek God's will together for the partnership relationship. It requires deep listening to the needs and concerns of each partner and a willingness to explore new ways to respond.



Working Ecumenical,

The Greek word “oikumene” means the whole household of God. One half of all Christians are Roman Catholic, one fourth are Pentecostal Protestants, and one-eighth are Orthodox. Mainline Protestants are among the remaining eighth of the world’s Christian population, yet Presbyterians are often the energizers in local and international ecumenism. While ecumenism in the future may begin to look different than it does today, we must stay on this challenging journey, welcoming all.

Developing Leaders

Building up the body of Christ around the world requires strong leadership by both lay and ordained persons. Through leadership development, the church in each place is empowered to lead worship, to provide Christian education and pastoral care, and to establish equal relationships with the mission-sending church. It often leads to the partner church’s ability to be self-supporting, and to send persons from the indigenous church in mission. It is the form of aid most requested by partners.

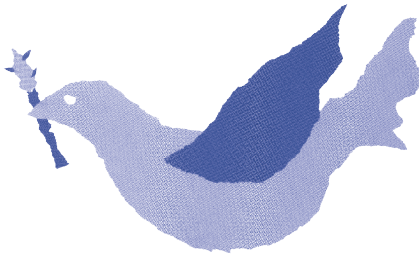
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Connecting Mission Near and Far

Both local and worldwide mission are part of the call we receive in baptism. People's lives are changed by mission experiences in another culture, whether local or international. Helping people link their reality to that of people throughout the world can deepen faith, shape vocational choices and change society. The home community has an important role in watering and nurturing seeds of faith, giving each person the opportunity to grow and change through God's mission.

Our church's historic mission presence around the world often draws new immigrants to U.S. Presbyterian congregations because they have already experienced Presbyterian mission and church life in their home countries. Presbyteries and congregations have a unique opportunity to respond to the interests and enthusiasms of immigrants looking for a Presbyterian church.

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Sharing People and Resources

The flow of people and resources in mission can be said to be like the circulatory system in the Body of Christ. Presbyterians rejoice that everything is God's. As God's stewards with others, we seek to share in ways that affirm and assist rather than demean or dominate.

We experience the reality of people's lives in another culture when we send people in mission. This helps us understand what it means to be a Christian in their cultural environment. The "web" of Presbyterians who incarnate the gospel around the world is increasingly complex and interconnected. From individuals to congregations, presbyteries and synods, from the denomination to validated mission support groups and mission networks, there are many people and resources available for mission. We are sometimes guests, sometimes hosts in the process of sharing people. As we share financial and other resources, we seek mutuality and accountability. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will strengthen its presence with partners as we find ever more creative ways to share people and resources in the future.

The World and Church Today

A vision for the future requires the church to name and understand the dynamics at work in the world we are called to serve in faith. The challenges and commitments stated in this vision emerge from an understanding of the following dynamics of our world and church today.

Dynamics in the World

Globalization

Globalization increases, with mixed effects. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) can model what it means to live responsibly and work in partnerships with others without assuming dominance and control. We can challenge one another to examine the effects of all forms of idolatry, including definitions of success that promote any and every manner of generating wealth instead of promoting demonstrations of the love and peace of Jesus Christ.

Ecology

As the planet's ecological health is endangered, and some places are made especially unhealthful, we should be reminded of God the Creator and our stewardship role. Our international mission involvements provide opportunities to answer this call for ecological health. This is part of the fullness of life we seek in faith, not only for ourselves, but also for poor, oppressed and disadvantaged people.





Interfaith tensions

We live in an increasingly multi-faith context, both in the U.S. and abroad. Our challenges include: finding ways to witness to our faith within relationships of mutual respect; to establish constructive dialogue with people of other faiths; and to work side by side with others for the sake of peace, justice and wholeness.

Population and power shifts

Social and economic pressures abound when the number of people surges in some countries and stagnates or declines in others. Christian mission must continue to address the needs of immigrant, refugee and displaced persons. Many Christian immigrants look to U.S. Christians to receive them hospitably. We are offered a chance to learn more about the gospel through this ministry.

Diseases of poverty

The diseases of poverty, which include AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, threaten the very survival of many international partners. For some PC(USA) partners, these diseases are radically altering their cultures, taking many of their leaders and active church participants. The wealthiest countries, including the U.S., should respond on a scale that would diminish the rate of disease and death.

Dynamics in the Church

Changing patterns of growth and mission

Other major changes affect Presbyterian mission. There is dramatic growth in the numbers of believers worldwide, especially among poor people, and an explosive growth of Pentecostalism. There is a vast movement of sending mission workers out from churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) needs to renew our commitment to ecumenism and Christian unity in response.

Facing religious conflict

Extremist religious agendas in national politics are a part of the realities of many Christians internationally. The U.S. experience of religious and political freedom may not prepare Americans to understand the situations of affected partners. Through listening and respecting our partners, we may learn ways to support them in their struggles.

Responding to opportunities and problems of globalization

Our partners struggle for opportunities for their people under the pressures of globalization. They ask Presbyterians to use our resources, connections and positions of strength to support and empower their pursuit of reconciliation and fullness of life.



Doing evangelism in context

Difficult social and political contexts are often the reality of our international partners. They hold the sharing of the gospel and concern for social justice as one whole expression of God's love in Jesus Christ. We have much to learn from them about holistic evangelism.

Dealing with shifts in patterns of support and connectionalism

Methods of funding the church are shifting. Donors with particular interests bring new resources to bear in international mission. We are called to be faithful to this trend while remaining faithful and creative with our partners.

Even as non-western churches' local identities are growing stronger, the political and social authority of the church is marginalized in many places. As a result, authority within churches is shifting from the connectional denomination to other kinds of connections. The church is challenged to improve coordination of efforts in response to the creative energy being unleashed.

Changes in the PC(USA) Affecting Mission Today

The challenges and commitments identified in this document emerge from a study of the world and the larger church. They also relate to the evolving characteristics of the Presbyterian and other mainline Protestant churches today. These characteristics affect our response to the challenges before us.

International connections have increased

- Technology and increasing mobility facilitate connections around the world. For instance, many more short-term mission trips are undertaken than in years past.
- A proliferation of mission organizations has created a diverse “mission marketplace” in which individual Presbyterians and congregations, presbyteries and synods have multiple mission opportunities open to them. They seek new kinds of supportive relationships with the rest of their denomination.

Education and nurture for mission has changed

- An increasing number of new members come from other Christian or unchurched backgrounds. In addition, the environment for Christian education and nurture has eroded.² With many church members less aware of their denomination’s mission activities and missionaries, we must find ways to revive the study of mission and the awareness of mission opportunities.
- Denominational “branding” began to matter less near the end of the 20th century. Local church identities formed by worship styles, curricula and mission involvements have become more significant.

² Milton Colalter, John Mulder and Louis Weeks, *Vital Signs: the Promise of Mainstream Protestantism*.

Local mission is often globally connected

- The world has come to our own neighborhoods. High rates of immigration have changed the cultural environment of communities across the United States.
- The word “poor” has come to describe not only those who are unemployed, but those who work in minimum-wage jobs or who are underemployed. Increasingly, people addressing poverty look at the global economy to understand the forces at work.

Demands on mission budgets have grown

- Welfare reform in the 1990s put continuing pressure on congregations to increase their support for local agencies and ministries.
- Funding for all ministries is uncertain, in part due to a decline in membership, a weak economy, and concerns for geopolitical stability. Mission committees and church sessions are asked to fund more than they can possibly support.

God asks each of us to make wise choices in the ways we support mission in the local community, across the U.S., and around the world. We prayerfully offer ***Gathering For God’s Future*** as a resource for making such choices.

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Witness, Discipleship, Community

It is time to take stock. As the *Book Of Order* says, “truth is in order to goodness.” (G-1.0304) What will the truth about God’s intentions for us convince us to be and to do in coming years?

Statements about God’s intentions are woven throughout *Gathering For God’s Future* and can be summarized with reference to the title itself.

Gathering for God’s Future

God’s saving intention is “to gather up all things” in Christ, in the “fullness of time.” This is the grand vision painted in the first chapters of Ephesians. The whole of scripture is about God’s tirelessness in this gathering work, and God’s call to us to join in it. To have a biblical faith is to be committed to participating in God’s mission.

Witness

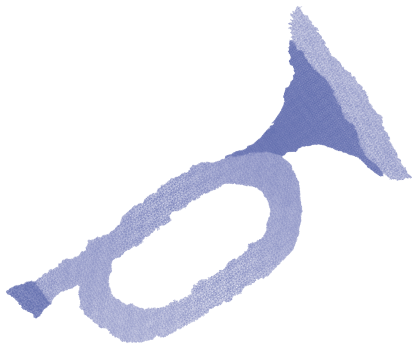
We are first of all aware of God as the witness of our lives and history. God expects much from us. We are expected to be witnesses to the truth of God known in Jesus Christ. We are expected to be witnesses everywhere and in every aspect of our lives.

Discipleship

To be a disciple of Jesus Christ involves everything stated and implied in the Great Commission — going, making other disciples, baptizing, and teaching about “everything I have commanded you.” We ourselves have to be transformed to be such disciples.

Community

The church is part of God’s plan. We are called into the community of the church, and we call new disciples into that community. With Christ as our head, the church community exists for the sake of God’s mission. We learn to serve in mission in a way that is faithful to the triune God. We are to model the kind of community God intends for all humanity. To be the church is to be one large mission society.

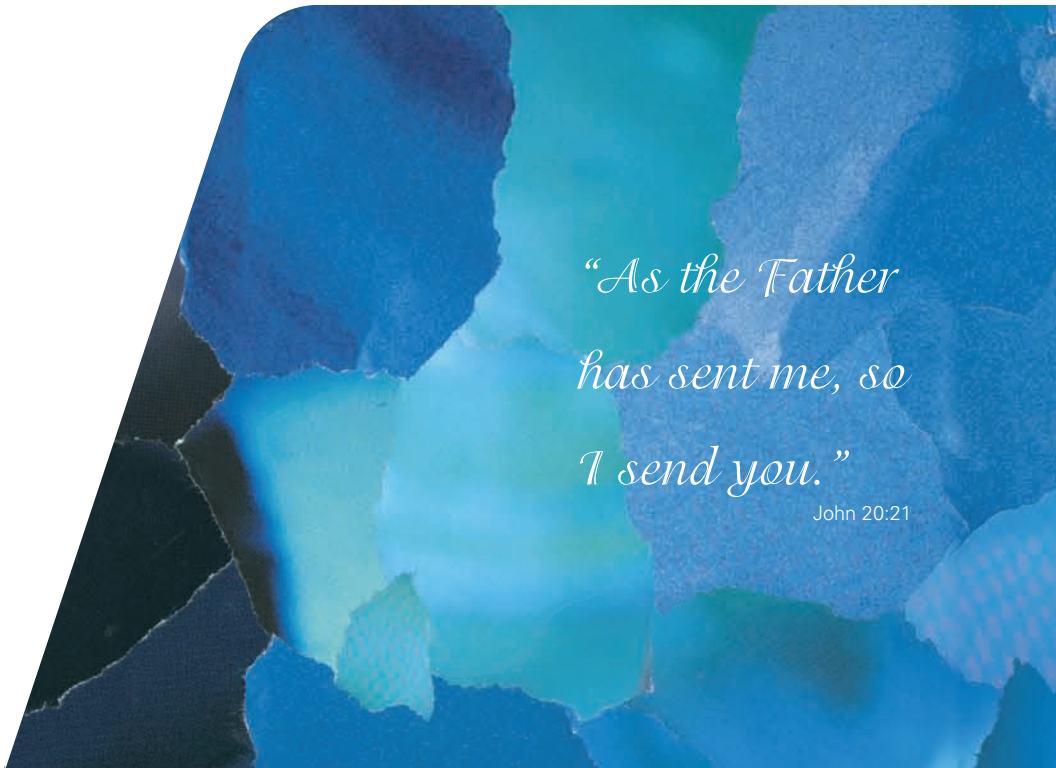


A Renewed Call To Worldwide Mission

God offers us an urgent call. It is a call to pray and discern. It is a call to study the most crying needs and the ways God would have us address them. It is a call to let God transform us for our role in the world church for the sake of God's intentions for the world. It is a call to partner with Christians near and far, mobilized as Presbyterians working together worldwide in witness, discipleship and community. It is a call to draw upon the tested commitments of Presbyterian mission as we face the crucial challenges of our day: *witnessing and evangelizing worldwide; equipping the church for transforming mission; engaging in ministries of reconciliation, justice, healing and grace; and living the good news of Jesus Christ in community with people who are poor.* May God help us to go forth in Jesus Christ's way. To God alone be the glory!

*“Go therefore and make
disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the
name of the Father, Son
and Holy Spirit, and
teaching them to obey
everything I have
commanded you.”*

Matthew 28:19-20



*“As the Father
has sent me, so
I send you.”*

John 20:21



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