

## **Mission Table 2015: Case Statement on Innovative Models of Pastoral Ministry**

**History:** There are many aging congregations experiencing a decline in resources and ministry capacity, sometimes exacerbated by diminished membership and sometimes by changing community demographics. Higher educational costs often mean seminary graduates step into ministerial roles carrying excessive debt. Many of our churches are not equipped to compensate those ministers in ways that not only pay a living wage but allow them to service that massive debt. As a result, a growing number of churches are faced with the need to consider new approaches to healthy and effective pastoral ministry. This is not a new phenomenon but has been accelerating at an alarming rate over the past decade. Some churches have chosen to address this issue by closing their doors, paying reduced salaries, hiring “anybody” to be their pastors.

**Accomplishments:** Churches and Regions have responded to this reality by creating yoked parishes, part time ministry positions, improving lay ministry training and adapting credentialing initiatives. In recent years Regions have been placing a stronger emphasis on bivocational ministry, being more intentional about raising up this model for pastoral ministry. Some seminaries are beginning to introduce the idea of innovative forms of pastoral ministry by challenging students to consider entrepreneurial approaches to vocational ministry.

**Challenges:** Part of the challenge is to have the difficult conversations with congregations about innovative forms of pastoral ministry in ways that do not communicate failure. This will challenge congregations to redefine their notions of “success.” Another part of the challenge is preparing congregations to deal with the deep change required to engage healthy ministry in a changing culture, both in the model of pastoral ministry and the mission of the church as a whole. These conversations and challenges need to come from within the congregation as well as from other diverse voices. Current pastoral leaders must speak prophetically to their congregations about the need for new approaches to ministry, and work alongside ABC partners to develop these new models for ministry. There must be an acknowledgment that this will require systemic change which ultimately will impact everything in the life of the congregation.

**Constituents and Stakeholders:** This need affects the ABC as a whole, including the local church, pastoral leaders, future leaders, seminaries, regions, and national mission partners. In addition to current pastors and church leaders leading change, we must better network with other partners in identifying and sharing stories of innovative and creative new models of pastoral ministry. We must share success stories to encourage local congregations to envision, experiment with and embrace viable alternatives. Networking will be critical in resourcing congregations in their exploration of innovative forms of pastoral ministry. It will be incumbent upon all stakeholders to help congregations identify giftedness in their members as they call forth and train disciples to engage in local church ministries.

**Summary Statement:** Recognizing that new and different approaches to pastoral ministry are not a sign of failure, we must embrace innovative models of pastoral ministry that will require difficult conversations, prophetic voices, and the development of and experimentation with new models for ministry.

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