

Mutual Ministry Review: A Process of Continuous Improvement

Mutual Ministry Review is a process to help congregations conduct mutual ministry reviews on a rolling basis throughout the year. The difficulty with scheduling a Mutual Ministry Review once a year is that people tend to save up concerns rather than addressing them as they arise. Accumulated questions and frustrations make it easy to turn a *ministry* review into a performance assessment—usually focused on the paid employees, since members of the congregation are reluctant to critique volunteers and volunteer positions are seldom designed to be held accountable.

A ministry review focuses on the *ministry*. The goal is to continually improve how we do ministry together because we have a shared passion for our part of God’s mission in the world. The focus is on how WE, together, can participate God’s mission in our community more effectively.

Discernment

The first step in a Mutual Ministry Review is to discern where God is leading us. We do that by looking at where we are and asking:

- Is this ministry restoring us and/or people who are not part of our church to unity with God and each other in Christ? (“What is the mission of the Church?” *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 855)
- Are we doing this ministry the best way possible? Are we doing it this way because this is how we’ve always done it or how we think it should be done? Do we need to reimagine how this ministry might look?
- Are the people engaged in this ministry energized or drained by it? The Spirit is usually evident in energy, not in something that is done out of a sense of duty.
- Are doors opening or closing? While we may need to overcome some resistance or obstacles, God tends to open doors – often side doors or doors in places we aren’t looking. Look for the possibilities opening before you.
- Is it bearing fruit? Is it producing the results we want and that are aligned with Scripture?

Ministry Areas: Vision & Goals

Identify 4-6 major areas that are the core functions of your ministry. This can include areas such as worship, education, stewardship, church growth, pastoral care, and service.

In each area of ministry, describe what you see as the ideal picture of that ministry. What would it look like IF... Write a few phrases or sentences that describe what you want to see rather than a mission statement. For example, a church with a struggling Sunday School, a desire to strengthen stewardship, and to grow in numbers might say:

- Formation: Our children and youth are fully engaged in worship, and they learn about the Christian faith and life both in events designed for them and by doing ministry along with the adults in our church and community. We know they are “getting it” because they are the ones coming up with great ministry ideas that captivate our adults and they are eagerly bringing their friends to church and ministry activities.

- Stewardship: We have enough money to do our ministries. We've implemented multiple green strategies at church and at home. We've grown in our connection with God's creation and our care of it. We've formed several great partnerships that use our buildings much of the time and invite the community into our space.
- Church growth: We've become an inviting church and we have new people joining our worship, formation and/or service ministries every month, mostly because our members are inviting them. We have several baptisms (including adults) each year. We have a growing team of laity who are sharing their faith with people who are on a journey of becoming Christians, rediscovering, or deepening their faith life.

Now take each area and identify 1-3 things you can do to move one step closer to the vision outlined for each area. For example:

- Formation:
 - We will invite 15 children and youth to be lectors, ushers, acolytes, and other liturgical ministers. We will train, support and encourage them so they do an excellent job. We will video them along with the adults and ask them to help think of how everyone can improve.
 - We will engage at least 50 members of all ages in making sandwiches for the local homeless shelter after church and then take the food there and join the guests for lunch. The next week we will all talk about our experience and how it is part of God's mission.
- Stewardship:
 - We will make our coffee hour green by eliminating Styrofoam and paper napkins; people will share in cleaning up and laundering cloth napkins and tablecloths
 - We will find one new partner to use the building and share in the costs and work of maintaining it.
- Church growth:
 - 50% of our active members will commit to building relationships with at least one family or individual and invite them to events at church.
 - We will have at least 1 fun event every six weeks that children, youth, and families will enjoy enough to invite their friends to come.

Decide who will do what to help make progress towards each goal. Make sure there are multiple people invested in doing it in addition to that goal's champion, the staff, or the clergyperson. Delegate the "how to" to the people who are prepared to lead each goal and make sure they have the resources they need.

Ministry Review

Now you are ready to do a Mutual Ministry Review. Build the review into the monthly Vestry meeting. Encourage the groups working on goals to do a similar check in when they meet to discuss or work on that goal. Set aside 15-20 minutes of each Vestry meeting to review one area. For example:

- Formation goal:
 - Children and youth will be invited to be lectors, ushers, acolytes, etc.
 - How many children and youth have been invited and how many participated?
 - How will the others be engaged? Who will do that?
 - What did we learn about inviting them?
 - What worked well and what did we learn from that?
 - What did not turn out as hoped and what did we learn from that?
 - Who seemed to be the best at engaging them?

- We will train, support and encourage the children and youth so they do an excellent job.
 - What training has been provided? By whom?
 - Who was most effective at training them?
 - How are they doing?
 - What is needed to help them improve?
 - What support and encouragement have they received? Who was best at doing that? What else can be done?
- We will video all the liturgical ministers and ask everyone to help think of how to improve.
 - How well did the videotaping work?
 - If the videotaping has not happened: What prevented it from happening? What is needed to get that to happen? Who is prepared to lead that?
 - Did they improve in their ministries afterwards?
 - What did we learn about using this training tool?
 - How might we apply that to other situations?
- What organizational factors supported progress or what support might be needed?
 - Administration (church office, committees, etc.)
 - Communications (newsletter, website, etc.)
 - Finances
 - Building/space
 - Leadership (Vestry, lay leaders, clergy, staff – e.g., in this case, Sunday School teachers or others in formation area)

As you can see, this line of questioning does not focus on any one person, but rather on the community as a whole and on the leadership team in particular. The idea is to focus on identifying obstacles that can be removed, reframing success in the church's current context, and what needs to be done to move forward. The goal is to learn from whatever happened (success, failure, steady state or surprises) and to look ahead to what you can do next.

Finally, at the end:

- *Say thank you and celebrate progress!*
- Ask for God's blessing on your ministries
- Clarify what you will do next and who will take responsibility for making that happen

Last Words

Remember all of this only takes 15-20 minutes at a Vestry meeting, maximum. If you take more time than that, you will get bogged down in details, get sidetracked into adjunct issues, and start figuring out how to deliver criticism to the person who didn't do what you expected.

What you focus on grows. If you focus on the negatives, that is what grows. If you focus on the positives, that is what grows. If you dwell the past, other than to learn from it initially, you get drawn into problem solving, analyzing, assigning blame—all safe activities that allow you to stand back from the ministry and critique those who are doing it. If you look to the future with a clear focus on: “What are we going to do next?” then you will move forward. See this review as just a snapshot that lets you see where you are and make quick adjustments to help you keep moving.

If some larger issue emerges that needs fuller discussion, put it on the agenda as a separate item—or, better yet, delegate it to a smaller team to research it and make a recommendation. The function of a Vestry, as with any board, is to establish policies, procedures and goals for the organization, oversee the resources (money, people, time, property) needed to carry out the organization's mission and goals, and then periodically review progress and make adjustments as needed. It is not the Vestry's job to dissect or discuss every problem or issue that arises. If it isn't policy, procedure, resources, or mission/goal related, delegate the problem or issue to the people most closely involved in that work or to a task force and let them do the work and report back.

Organizations do better when meetings are shorter and more focused. In our context, we need to do more ministry and less talking about it! Learning how to do a monthly review of a key ministry area in a calm and succinct way helps keep us from talking about ministry but never getting around to doing it. So:

- Keep it simple and keep it moving along.
- Keep it focused on continual improvement.
- Keep it positive; see failures and problems as learning opportunities.
- If something just isn't working, that is important feedback. It may be time to let it go and do something else.
- Affirm people, give thanks, seek God's blessing.