

### **F-1.0404: Openness**

*“In Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all creation, **the Church seeks a new openness to God’s mission in the world.***

*In Christ, the triune God tends the least among us, suffers the curse of human sinfulness, raises up a new humanity, and promises a new future for all creation.*

*In Christ, Church members share with all humanity the realities of creatureliness, sinfulness, brokenness, and suffering, as well as **the future toward which God is drawing them.***

*The mission of God pertains not only to the Church but also to people everywhere and to all creation.*

***As it participates in God’s mission, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) seeks:***

***- a new openness to the sovereign activity of God in the Church and in the world, to a more radical obedience to Christ, and to a more joyous celebration in worship and work;***

- How does the agency demonstrate that it is open to God’s activity in the church and in the world?

The Mission Agency is open to God’s activity in the church and the world as it interacts with its partners in mission and ministry and responds to current events around the globe in multiple ways.

This openness is largely because most of our staff feel called to this work. Many of our staff face significant challenges in meeting the needs of the church with resources that have declined over the past decades. I know that God’s Spirit is working among them to inspire them to the work each day and to sustain them in their ministry. I know that this work would not be possible in today’s context of rapid change, without a deep sense of personal commitment to follow God’s lead in response to each day’s emerging challenge.

I believe the public prayers for God’s continued guidance at the opening and closing of our meetings and our weekly worship in the chapel are a vital part of our openness to God’s activity in the church and the world and our part in that activity.

- How does the agency engage in prayerful discernment as it seeks to be obedient to Christ?

Ultimately the Presbyterian Mission Agency is accountable to the collective discernment of individuals elected/commissioned to discern the mind of Christ as it relates to the national expression of the mission of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) The actions and oversight of the PMA Board and the General Assembly itself, represent the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit into and through our planning. (John 3:8) While there is also a sense of discernment that is made clear in the doing of the work, the discernment of more inclusive elected/commissioned bodies provides a level of vision that is beyond the agency’s purview.

Meeting at least monthly the PMA Leadership Cabinet combines individual discernment as leaders seek wisdom on how to best move forward in mission with the resources available to their areas and collective discernment as they seek to discern the best use of resources for the whole church.

- What could the agency do to bring more joy to its staff, to members of the church, and to the world?

Joy comes from linking one's gifts with the needs of others, and finding God's presence at that intersection. In a recent PMAB employee survey, four of the top six motivating aspects for our employees (in addition to compensation and benefits) were:

- Opportunities to make a difference in people's lives
- Living out my call
- Appreciation for my work
- Opportunities to strengthen the PC(USA).

Indeed, the number one answer, and the only one listed as a significant reason to work for the Mission Agency within every area of the agency, was the opportunity to make a difference. So, to bring more joy to the staff PMA leadership seeks to find ways to make it clear to all staff that their work does make a difference; it is a means of living out God's call in their lives, that their work is appreciated and it strengthens the church.

For the wider church, I think a similar principle is operative. Joy comes at the intersection of inspiration and ability. PMA's role is to inspire, equip and connect the church. When we do that well, members are inspired and equipped to fulfill God's mission, bringing joy.

*- a new openness in its own membership, becoming in fact as well as in faith a community of women and men of all ages, races, ethnicities, and worldly conditions, made one in Christ by the power of the Spirit, as a visible sign of the new humanity;*

- How does the agency foster community within the agency? How can the agency build greater trust among the agency staff?

Community and trust are the byproducts of time spent together in shared play, shared prayer and shared information. They come from knowing each other, and anticipating how the other will act in a given situation. The Mission Agency seeks to foster intra-agency community and trust through these same avenues:

- Shared events – book studies, employee social events, service projects
- Weekly worship services, and special worship gatherings linked to the liturgical seasons
- Quarterly all staff meetings, sharing notes from senior leadership meetings

I believe we interact across program and agency "boundaries" in meetings. The formal and informal interaction that happens at many of our meetings, large and small, fosters community in ways we often discount.

There's a method that uses the VALUE mnemonic that might focus our work in this area. **Value** what employees are saying. **Acknowledge** the emotions behind what they're going through. **Listen. Understand** where they're coming from and **Elicit** questions.

We strive to keep the whole staff informed in a timely manner. PMA has recently made informing staff first when major events occur a priority.

It is our hope that these efforts foster trust. In the end trust can be given or it can be withheld. It cannot be coerced. Through repetitive practice, our hope is to create enough sense of safety and security that staff will be willing to extend their trust.

- How does the agency promote unity and connectedness in the whole church? How can the agency build greater trust within the PC(USA)?

The Mission Agency has the great advantage of having mission at its heart. The church's mission is a common mission. Our hope is that by inspiring, equipping and connecting Presbyterians in mission, we will simultaneously be part of creating a sense of unity and connectedness.

- What are your thoughts about white privilege in the PCUSA? How can the agency contribute to building a church that truly honors God, celebrates the diversity of God's creation by lifting up all people, and demonstrates that we are all one in Christ Jesus?

In many ways, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was built on white privilege. As a small group of white Scots-Irish immigrants found economic success in colonial and frontier America, its members' stature rose in national circles. Their increased status led to greater privilege for their Presbyterian kin. They rode those advantages through most of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. While the civic advantages began to decrease in the 1960's, the advantage of 300 years remains.

Commissioners to multiple General Assemblies have discerned a call to move beyond the church's traditional Scots-Irish base and to embrace a multi-ethnic/multi-racial future, in most congregations the worship hour remains America's most segregated hour.

Those who have benefited from 300 years of privilege will need to find a way to lay it down for the higher calling of the gospel. The signs of privilege are everywhere: institutions of higher learning, "decently and in (white) order" practices; Roberts' Rules, segregated communities, segregated congregations, large endowments designed to maintain the preferences of long-dead donors. Change will be very difficult...an institution built over 300 years will take time to recalibrate, but it begins by embracing the words of the prophet Isaiah:

"Clear the LORD's way in the desert!  
Make a level highway in the desert for our God!  
Every valley will be raised up,  
and every mountain and hill will be flattened.  
Uneven ground will become level,  
and rough terrain a valley plain.  
The LORD's glory will appear,  
and all humanity will see it together;  
the LORD's mouth has commanded it."

*- a new openness to see both the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms in order to ensure the faithfulness and usefulness of these forms to God's activity in the world;*

- What are some possibilities in the agency which would allow the agency to be more faithful and useful for what God is doing in the world?

We should be as open as possible to change by looking for ways to focus our mission by integrating our ministries and being open to structural and organic change which enable us to be more faithful and useful.

Our staff leadership and Board should look for ways to make the discernment of what God is doing in the world an ongoing part of our planning. Our planning should seek to identify our specific call as a part of what God is doing.

- What are some perils in the agency's institutional form which could inhibit faithful obedience to God?

Being overly dependent on restricted/designated giving is a possible peril. Realizing that this peril exists the agency is moving toward a balanced approach which stresses the advantage of unrestricted giving. Restricted gifts tend to lock discernment in the past and may tie the hands of future generations. Over dependence on restricted giving discourages the creation of a nimble agency, able to shift priorities in a timely manner.

- What are the things you hold on to as essential and carry forward, even as you are open to the new?

The belief that groups make better decisions than individuals.

"The Church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life.

The Church is to be a community of hope, rejoicing in the sure and certain knowledge that, in Christ, God is making a new creation. This new creation is a new beginning for human life and for all things. The Church lives in the present on the strength of that promised new creation." F-1.0301

- If you could change one thing within the agency which would create new opportunities to do the agency's job better, what would that be?

I pray for a wider embrace of vocation as God's call on our lives. We often have a hierarchical understanding of God's call, with some parts of Christ's body being accorded a higher status than other parts. Sometimes that elevation is for parish ministry, other times is it for mid council work. Sometimes that high calling is to national service, or more specifically programmatic functions, rather than administrative. However, if we believe that God calls the church into being, and has created different gifts, then the faithful demonstration of those gifts is a high calling, without the need to diminish those who serve in less visible roles. An earlier question asked what we could do to foster joy...an answer can be found in honoring all forms of work as parts of Christ's body, and as faithful use of the gifts Christ gives.

*- a new openness to God's continuing reformation of the Church ecumenical, that it might be more effective in its mission."*

- What new ecumenical partnerships and collaboration have been most effective in accomplishing the agency's mission? What new ecumenical partnerships would help the agency be more effective in mission?

The Mission Agency is part of many coalitions with other persons of faith, as well as within the Christian tradition. Our work of advocacy is often achieved through coalitions. Disaster response is often done through ecumenical channels, using the skills of partners who are most equipped to provide relief in a given area of the world. We work ecumenically through the National Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches. We embrace this work, for as a former Stated Clerk was fond of saying, "To be Presbyterian is to be ecumenical."

- What is your agency saying "no" to right now in order to focus energy on what you need to say "yes" to? What would the agency love to do but cannot?

Over the past two decades many ministries have been ended, so that we might continue the ones that we presently have. Saying "no" is very difficult. In addition to individual discernment by staff leadership charged with the responsibilities of managing, developing and proposing budgets; the process is accompanied by collective discernment at the Board and General Assembly levels. The lack of prioritization at the most inclusive levels of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) means that in those larger gatherings, a sizable constituency for every GA level ministry may be found. Often their advocacy principles are determined in advance of the discernment session, and their perspectives are not changed by the discernment that takes place at the meeting, because they stand outside in the more political sphere, rather than inside the discernment process. So, it is difficult to sustain a "no" given the political force of advocates, but it will occasionally happen.

I would love for there to be a clear sense of discernment at these gatherings which would unite the church in one direction, rather than simply creating a lull until the next round of budgets.