

Risk-Taking Service and Mission

Risk-Taking Service and Mission includes the projects, the efforts, and work people do to make a positive difference in the lives of others for the purposes of Christ, whether or not they will ever be part of the community of faith.

(Robert Schnase, Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations, page 83)

Schnase reminds us that our *mission* turns church service outward. Our *mission* is not only within the walls of the church or among the people of the body of Christ who are regularly seen and already known. Our mission is to extend the compassion, grace, and love of Christ to the world.

Risk-taking service and mission takes people into ministries that push them out of their comfort zone, stretching them beyond the circle of relationships and practices that routinely define their faith commitments. *(Schnase, page 87)*

Jesus says: “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.” (Luke 6:32-33)

Risk-taking service and mission involves work that stretches people, causing them to do something for the good of others that they would never have considered doing if it were not for their relationship with Christ and their desire to serve him. *(Schnase, page 88)*

As we practice Risk-Taking Service and Mission, God’s Spirit:

- Changes us
- Changes others
- Changes our churches

Risk-Taking Service & Mission is a life-changing experience.

What does the Bible say?

The following scripture references might be used to help you reflect on Risk-taking Service and Mission. What do these passages say about being a people or a church’ in mission’? What are the risks involved?

Luke 17:11-19 – Jesus heals ten lepers

Matthew 5:13-16 – Salt and Light

Luke 4:14-19 – Jesus begins his work and defines his mission

Matthew 22:34-40 – the Great Commandment

Matthew 25:31-45 – The final judgement

Luke 6:27-36 – Love for enemies

James 1:22-25 – Hearing and obeying

James 2:14-17 – Faith and Works

Luke 10:25-37 – The good Samaritan

1 John 3:17-19 – Loving others

Some questions for reflection:

- Think about a time when an act of service you performed changed your life. What was the experience like?
- Why do you think it made such an impact on you? In what ways might it have been outside your comfort zone?
- How is service and mission a part of faith development in your congregation?
- Where do you see children, teens, and adults learning about and being inspired to respond to service opportunities?
- In your congregation, where do you most often hear about service and mission projects, their stories, and results? How are these woven into the story of the church?
- Looking over the past year, are the mission activities in your congregation repeat projects? How many new ideas arise and how have they been launched? How are new project ideas discussed and launched?
- What individuals or committees have to approve a new idea? What are the steps?
- How do we support people who are most energized around service and mission? Sometimes the process we use to get approval for projects is so long that it kills the enthusiasm and the project dies.

Calculating the Risks in our Mission:

Risk-taking draws our attention to the truth that many of our most urgent ministries have an uncertain, unpredictable quality. We cannot know whether or not our efforts will make the difference we hope. Much of our hardest work may have little visible impact or may seem to end in utter failure.

Risk-Taking Service and Mission can be challenging and even scary for many. It may bring congregations to places and to an encounter with people with whom they have never interacted before. It is important to calculate the risks before setting out on a new mission project. Where might the resistances or the pitfalls be? How can you plan ahead to deal with them?

Schnase reminds us that churches shaped by Risk-Taking Service & Mission consciously seek to motivate people to more extraordinary service. They don't let fear of controversy or resistance within the congregation override their support for ministries of compassion by members called to such work.

They don't criticize those who cannot or will not work on the front lines beyond the comfort zone, but they work intentionally to develop ways in which everyone can play a supportive role. The spirit of mission unites rather than divides.

If Risk-Taking Service and Mission is "helping those who may never be a part of your congregation", then reflect on these questions:

- How does your congregation offer its ministry of compassion, mercy, and justice in the community?
- List some ministries in your church that make the greatest impact in the community for people who may never be a part of the congregation
- What groups of people can you list who are in your community who, though they may not ever attend or join your church, could be helped?
- Make a list of your congregation's services to the community. How many are face-to-face? Who do they serve?
- How have these ministries changed your congregation and the lives of its members?

Think about the message of your church in the community.

- Are there ministries that your church is known for in the community?
- What do non-members in your town or city know about your church? Is it a message of compassion or generosity?
- How might your congregation work in partnership with other congregations or community organizations to practice risk-taking service and mission?
- Name 3 really bold and risky ways to be at work in the community

Churches that practice Risk-Taking Service and Mission value:

1. **Contact**
2. **Engagement**
3. **Long-term relationships**

These churches measure the impact of their work in lives changed rather than in money sent or buildings constructed. *(Schnase, page 96)*

The practice of risk-taking Service and Mission is not limited to what people do as an extension of the church congregation's ministry. Many people in their work or volunteer roles outside of the church may be involved in various aspects of Service and Mission that are risk-taking.

“Prayers, presence, gifts, and service” includes the service that members do for the purposes of Christ in the community as representatives of the congregation. *(Schnase, page 97)*

Service projects may become an entry point into the church and into life in Christ. There are many people with no religious affiliation and no church home who want to make a difference, who have a longing to improve the conditions of other people, and a desire to make the world a better place by challenging poverty, suffering, and injustice.

What's the opposite of risk-taking? Safe. Predictable. Comfortable. Certain. Convenient. These words do not describe the ministry of Jesus Christ who said:

“For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.” (Lk 9:24)

Some common tools for discerning Service & Mission needs are:

- Taking a walk through your community and identifying the needs you see
- Making use of an 'envirionics' study which gives a snapshot of your community
- Using the local newspaper. Desmond Tutu said that the newspaper is “God's to-do list”.
- Work in partnership with other social services and community organizations

The practice of Risk-Taking Service and Mission reminds us that congregations are not ends in themselves; they are resources God uses to change lives and transform the world.

(Schnase, page 100)