

## Calling Conversation: Involvement in our Community

*Excerpt from "Risk-Taking Mission and Service" in Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations  
by Robert Schnase*

The word *mission* turns church service outward. Mission reminds congregations that Christ's compassion, grace, mercy, and love extend to the entire world, and these fruits are cultivated not only within the walls of the church or among the people of the Body of Christ who are regularly seen and already known. Mission refers to the positive difference made in the lives of people beyond the inner circle of the church...

The earliest written scriptures record a consistent emphasis upon justice, compassion, respect, and love for the neighbor... The theme continues in the writings of the prophets, "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness; and to walk humbly with your God." ...The stories, teachings, and parables of Jesus consistently point toward God's love for the poor, the sick, the outcast, and those most vulnerable to the oppressions of society.

So, if *mission* and *service* appropriately describe the volunteer impulses and outward reach that characterize so many of our congregations, why qualify them with the adjective *risk-taking*? Vibrant, fruitful, growing congregations push beyond ordinary service and everyday missions to offer extraordinary opportunities for life-changing engagement with people.

Risk-taking steps into greater uncertainty, a higher possibility of discomfort, resistance, or sacrifice. Risk-Taking Mission and Service 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 communities. God uses such ministries to expose church members to people, situations, and needs that they never ordinarily encounter and that reveal to them spiritual qualities and practical talents that, apart from their deliberate intention of serving Christ, they would never discover. The most poignant of Jesus' teachings and practices were costly demonstrations of unexpected love that transformed lives, families, communities, and the world.

**Questions for Conversation:**

Which of our current outreach projects are you most passionate about?

What issues affect our community that you think we ought to talk about?

How are our faith lives connected to our lives beyond the church?

How could we begin examining some of the systemic questions raised by community needs (for example, *why* are people hungry and homeless)?

What partnerships could we nurture so that we can be more effective?

Are there ways we could recognize and support the work people are already doing in the community (with or without the church)?

What are some “next steps” we might take to continue exploring this calling?