What is a Mutual Ministry Review? First, it is NOT an assessment of the clergy. The key word is “mutual.” What has the leadership, ordained and lay, been working on? What is the parish learning? How is Christ being made manifest? These are the larger questions an MMR is meant to tease out. If there is conflict to be resolved, that’s a different thing. If there are disagreements between the priest and the congregation about vision, that’s a different thing too.

There are times when it’s worth taking a “deep dive.” A very helpful tool in these cases is to use the Congregational Assessment Tool, which all parishes in our diocese use during times of clergy transition. But re-entry after a Sabbatical or the discernment process to call a priest-in-charge as rector are examples of when this deeper dive might be helpful. In this case there is prep work for the entire congregation and usually a Saturday morning is set aside to do this work.

In between, MMRs are usually akin to a “well visit” or annual check-up with a doctor. It’s a chance to have some conversation that most vestries have a hard time having at regular meetings in the midst of normal business. So it’s a time set aside to reflect on past, present, and future. Usually the members of the vestry and the priest are present – and this is not open to the entire congregation. In some instances, however, this is helpful. It’s worth discussing beforehand if this might be the case.

Usually the time required is about ninety minutes. We begin with prayer and invoking God’s Holy Spirit. The facilitator reminds those gathered that this is about mutual ministry. We begin with review: where has God been at work in the past year or so? What have been the challenges and what is worth celebrating?

We take some time to become more fully aware of the challenges and celebrations in the present moment. What are the resources, both financial and spiritual? What is the happening in the neighborhood? Are there opportunities to be partnering with God in the neighborhood.

And then we spend some time dreaming: what is God calling on this place to do at this time in the next near or so? This is not a strategic plan! It’s about next steps. What one or two new things might be tried, and who will do those, and how might this be evaluated?

That’s it. The important thing is that it allows for some reflection, together with diocesan support. And that this not be a one and done conversation but that specific “next steps” will be made and follow-up will happen. This may include, but not be limited to, spending ten minutes at the next three vestry meetings on the topic of “revisiting our most recent MMR.” This is not a box to be checked to apply for diocesan grants! It’s an opportunity to get some clarity about the work God has given us to do. Always with God’s help.

Faithfully,

The Rev. Canon Rich Simpson and the Rev. Mary Rosendale