

Missional Incubator Q&A

Missional: Loving people. Engaging community on their terms and their turf.

Incubator: Space to dream. Growing dreams into reality.

Unless it is the LORD who builds the house, the builders' work is pointless. (Psalm 127:1)

GENERAL

Why start a Missional Incubator?

The National Capital Presbytery perceives a need for a more proactive, intentional approach to establishing new worshipping communities and new expressions of existing churches. The decline in church membership, the increasing pace of church closures, and the growing disconnect between current ministries and a postmodern culture create an urgency for a different strategy. This strategy will need to include projects that incorporate a mixed economy ministry which can provide income streams to the mission while, at the same time, increasing opportunities to engage with individuals who would not be attracted to a more traditional church.

What is a mixed economy ministry?

One way to look at mixed economy in ministry is to consider the many small towns across the United States that were once factory towns. When the dominant business closes, the entire town suffers. Restaurants, grocery stores, hardware stores, schools, and churches all suffer because the town was dependent on a single economic stream. Towns that have multiple employers can usually survive the loss of one business.

Churches that have only one way to be church suffer when that approach does not resonate with new emerging culture and people. Mixed economy ministry is not that you stop being church as you know it. Rather, it is adding a new way of being church alongside existing church, creating a diversity of ways to engage the ever-changing landscape of the local community.

Is mixing church and business even biblical?

Mixed-economy expressions of church have been with us since the beginning of church; throughout scripture are stories of how God used shepherds, vinedressers, farmers, accountants, financial planners, tent makers, textile business owners, fishers, and many others to lead and gather God's people.

The disciples fished for a living. When Peter said, "I'm going fishing," to the other disciples in the gospel of John after Jesus' death, they needed resources. Lydia met Paul and company at her place of work. She hosted the church in Philippi at her home, likely also where she conducted her business as a merchant of purple cloth. Paul worked leather with Priscilla and Aquilla as a tentmaker. Their business provided a needed commodity for people while providing opportunities for conversation and connection AND funding the mission.

Why is the Missional Incubator of the National Capital Presbytery being hosted at Riverside Church?

Riverside is a start. Our goal in the next three years is to create multiple host sites as the Missional Incubator grows and takes root. Currently Riverside is a "demonstration plot" to help participants in the Missional Incubator expand their imagination. Riverside has been operating a mixed economy ministry since 2017. After leasing space since its founding in 1997, Riverside purchased half of a building in a Sterling office park. Riverside's sanctuary occupies part of the first floor and it leases upstairs office spaces to tenants who have become part of the larger church community. Rent from the tenants offsets the majority of Riverside's space costs. Significantly, a large section of the first floor is home to a public coffeeshop, Ridgetop Coffee and Tea, which is owned by Riverside. The coffeeshop welcomes a large and diverse customer base who come for quiet teleworking, social gatherings, game nights, knitting circles, community dinners, and more. Most do not attend Riverside Church (or, in some cases, even know that they are in a church). However, increasingly we see the "church curious" dropping off their children in Sunday school while they have coffee, engage in conversations about church, or attend worship themselves. We believe in meeting people where they are and the coffeeshop has been a steady source of new members.

Riverside's founding pastor, Brian Clark, has been released from his work as pastor to lead the Missional Incubator. The primary things Brian brings to the table are his faith in the Holy Spirit and his understanding of the need for unique and contextual expressions of church.

Who will be involved in the Missional Incubator?

The missional incubator will require the involvement of a variety of people:

- **Entrepreneurs and leaders:** Leaders from existing churches or people hired for nine months to a year to design a new, compelling business or missional social enterprise that could lead to a new expression of church or start a new worshiping community. If successful in the design phase they will then implement the new missional business or social enterprise.
- **Investors:**
 - Individuals and groups willing to invest in a venture whose major return is community good and the creation of a new expression of church. This is for individuals and groups that are in a position to risk their investment knowing there is no guarantee of financial success but that a particular missional compelling business is worth that risk.
 - Churches that will financially support a business connected to their or another church.
 - Churches willing to allow the repurpose of all or some of their facilities for a new expression of church to emerge through a compelling business or social enterprise.
- **The Cloud:** People with experience who will surround the Missional Incubator, providing needed direction and advice at timely moments. The cloud should include tax accountants and attorneys, builders, designers and architects, city planners, business owners, entrepreneurs, marketers, organizational experts, real estate experts, community organizers, creatives, artists, social workers, and others.

PROGRAM

What will the program look like day-to-day for leaders looking to start a new expression of church out of their existing church community?

A possible schedule for the weekly Incubator of participants currently serving an existing church who will be the leaders, but not necessarily the entrepreneur to begin the new expression of church:

- Tuesday: Mission Development--Site visits, partnership development, relationship building, research, mission plan development, creating a "local" team of people who will be "with you" in this mission. The lead person will set aside one day a week with the others in the Missional Incubator 10 AM - 3 PM. These gatherings will rotate being held at Ridgetop Coffee and Tea, your church, and the churches of the others in the Incubator.
- The lead person will gather a team of 2-3 people connected with their Church who will meet monthly with the lead as dreamers, conversation partners, discerners, and explorers of this new mission.
- The lead person will engage through their work week in a regular posture of listening and learning as a missional practice in their local context:
 - community conversations
 - trying a few experiments as a process of honing the most viable compelling business plan
 - prayer walking the community
- The lead person will engage through the week in spiritual practices that will support the missional practices.

What will the program look like day-to-day for leaders looking to start a new worshiping community?

A possible schedule for the weekly Incubator of participants hired to begin a new worshiping community may look like this:

- Sunday: Work in partner church or in Ridgetop Coffee & Tea (if the mission will be partnering with a café business).
- Monday: Work in partner church or in Ridgetop Coffee & Tea (if the mission will be partnering with a café business).
- Tuesday: Mission Development--Site visits, partnership development, relationship building, research, mission plan development, creating a “local” team of people who will be “with you” in this mission.
- Wednesday: Mission Development--Site visits, partnership development, relationship building, research, mission plan development, creating a “local” team of people who will be “with you” in this mission.
- Thursday: Once or twice a month, training, prayer, and worship engaging a wide range of presenters working to increase imagination, skills, courage, and competencies under the guidance of the Director of the Training Center.
 - Those interested in being Commissioned Ruling Elders (CREs) or members of the National Capital Presbytery who are interested in being a missional leader of a new thing will be welcome to attend the Thursday Trainings.
 - One Training a month will have a portion of the time open to anyone in the Presbytery who is interested in the topic.
- Friday: off
- Saturday: off

What is the schedule for the Missional Incubator?

The goal is for 7-10 established churches in the National Capital Presbytery to commit to taking part in the Missional Incubator by the end of June. Weekly meetings will start in September of 2024.

What is the timing and the outline of the curriculum of the first Missional Incubator group?

A rough overview of curriculum or approach for the first year is:

- **Establishing Identity:** September- October (Getting Started and Defining what you believe about church, witness, Jesus, justice, service, and other key elements that should define your work)
- **Discerning the Vision:** October - December (Discerning “Who” God is moving you to engage and “Why” start something new through multiple group site visits and key community interviews)
- **Exploring Possibilities:** January-March (creating a few experiments, focused field trips, researching, possibly recruiting entrepreneur(s) to assisting in the creating of the plan)
- **Developing a Plan:** March - May (business plan, investors identified, mission plan, possibly developing a leadership team to help create and implement the plan)
- **Implementing the Plan:** September - next 24 months (securing finances, hiring staff, construction, beginning)

PARTICIPATION

How do I participate in the Missional Incubator?

If you believe the Missional Incubator is right for you or your church, contact Brian Clark, the Director of the Missional Incubator (bclark@thepresbytery.org). There will be opportunities to join the Missional Incubator throughout the year with a second group starting in January 2025.

How do I participate in the “Cloud”?

There are many ways you can help those interested in starting a missional compelling business or a social enterprise. Those willing to serve on the Cloud will meet twice a year to hear how things are progressing and to learn about the status of the projects. Your expertise will be called on when needed. If you are willing to serve on the Cloud, contact Brian Clark (bclark@thepresbytery.org), the Director of the Missional Incubator.

How do I invest in a project of the Missional Incubator?

If you are interested in investing contact Brian Clark (bclark@thepresbytery.org), the Director of the Missional Incubator, and he will set up a time to discuss with you your interests and match you with a project that would excite you on terms that make sense for you.

Who pays for my participation?

Existing churches are expected to allow the participating pastor or leaders to participate in the Missional Incubator as part of their call, plus cover mileage traveling to gatherings of the Missional Incubator. Expenses of participants when the Missional Incubator group is meeting are covered, including meals, and materials provided by the Missional Incubator. If mileage creates a hardship, scholarships will be available. Contact Brian Clark, the Director of the Missional Incubator (bclark@thepresbytery.org).