

A photograph of a rocky landscape. The rocks are reddish-brown and covered with patches of light-colored lichen. In the center, a purple flower with five petals is in bloom, surrounded by green, needle-like plants and some moss. The overall scene is a natural, rugged environment.

# Starting New Initiatives: A Discernment Process



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# **Starting New Initiatives: A Discernment Process**



## **Module One: Prepare**





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# Introduction

## What is Module One?

Module One: Prepare is the first in a series of three movements designed to assist congregations as they discern how God is calling them to live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

### **Module One: Prepare**

God prepares us for the new thing God is about to do. It starts with the Session, because these are the designated spiritual leaders of our congregations. Thus *Module One: Prepare* is designed for the Session of a church to use in their regularly scheduled meetings.

### **Module Two: Engage**

God invites us to see God's mission in the world with new eyes. Module Two brings the ideas and experiments of Module One to the wider congregation, inviting an engagement with the community surrounding the congregation.

### **Module Three: Send**

God sends us out as new people to participate in God's mission in the world. Module Three takes the community experiments of Module Two and solidifies it into more intentional strategy / direction for engaging the community.

*Module One: Prepare* provides ten "Gatherings" to be used in a Session's regularly scheduled meetings / retreats. *Gathering One* is designed to kick off this module and so could be used as a half-day Session event / retreat. *Gatherings Two-Nine* are designed to be used in the regularly scheduled meeting, taking up 45 minutes of the meeting. The 45-minute times of *Gatherings Two-Nine* are meant to replace and augment a typical Session's opening devotions. *Gathering Ten* is designed to tie up the year with a 2-hour wrap up, so it would need to be the full Session meeting or be done at an additional meeting. Each Gathering leads the elders into an engagement with a passage of Scripture. Hopefully Session members find that

these discussions around Scripture provide spiritual renewal for their personal lives.

Homework will be given between each Gathering. The type of homework varies. Sometimes the homework is a question(s) for reflection. Other times the homework consists of a more active experiment to engage in as individuals, pairs, or teams. The homework is a critical part of the process! **This work between meetings is not meant to keep people busy, but to continue and deepen the conversation and learning!** *Module One: Prepare* is based on cycles of reflection...action...reflection...action. We believe this is the way forward for congregations who are seeking to bear new fruit in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## **Why start these three modules with elders?**

“It is the duty of elders, individually and jointly, to strengthen and nurture the faith and life of the congregation committed to their charge.” [G-6.0303] We understand that many of the current Session members might not see themselves as the dreamers and visionaries of the congregation, but have tremendous gifts in administration and oversight. The hope is to first till the soil with the current elders, so that more productive moving forward in the future is encouraged. The elders must eventually support, or allow, the growing that will take place in the next two modules. The following modules involve all of the leaders, visionaries, key people, and dreamers of the congregation. The Session is the group who is to hold the vision of the congregation and bless the direction of the work of the people of God.

## **Why would you use this resource?**

We hope this process creates a culture where Sessions are spiritual leaders and not business managers. We know many elders feel disconnected at times between the mission of God and the work of the Session. Elders want to feel like their work on Session makes a difference in the world. We believe this resource creates the possibilities and spiritual renewal for this to happen.

The purpose of this tool is to break ground for a renewed journey of bearing fruit. We hope to till the soil for new life. When planting seeds or annuals in our gardens each spring, we first need to break up the dirt that has been hardened through a

winter of snow and rain. Applying this image to congregations, it is a regular part of our seasonal flow that we need to break up the dirt for new life to be borne and bear fruit in our church, and through our church into our surrounding community. Tilling the soil is capacity building work.

What is meant by *capacity building*? A good definition is the following: *Capacity building is the elements that give fluidity, flexibility, and functionality within an organization so that it is able to adapt to the changing needs of the population that is served.* We hope that *Module 1: Prepare* promotes a congregation's fluidity, flexibility, and functionality to adapt to the changing needs of the church's surrounding community. Fluidity refers to our adaptability in entering into the new life God may call forth in us. Flexibility refers to the permission giving nature of our church which encourages new life. Functionality refers to our congregation's ability to lead processes that enable us to bear fruit in our efforts. Most importantly, we hope this tool increases a congregation's capacities through deepened spiritual connection with God. This connection is sought through an engagement with one another in strategic discussions, as well as through Scripture, prayer, action, and reflection.

It is designed to be used within the normal flow of your Session's work. It will increase the functionality of your session meeting and add spiritual depth to your meetings and to elders' lives. It will help you discern the Spirit's movement within your church, and your surrounding community. At the end, your Session is brought to a decision making point of whether to take this process deeper and wider into the entire congregation, and if so, *Module 2: Engage* and *Module 3: Send* provides you with ongoing resources in order to do just that.

## **How would you use this resource?**

*\*\* Spiritual discernment is needed before beginning the process! \*\**

First, the Session needs to engage in spiritual discernment about whether this would be an appropriate and relevant tool for them. A Session would need to discuss whether they are ready for this process at this time. They need to discern whether this is the resource that will best help them move into God's future for their church. The Session especially needs to discern if they are each willing to commit to this process.

*Module One: Prepare* begins with a way of creating your own covenant of commitment for this process.



We would *strongly* advise against a pastor or elder bringing this resource to the Session and saying, “I found this, let’s start it tonight.” Deep spiritual discernment takes time. It allows everyone to have voice, check for clarity of understanding, and provides time for God to speak. The work of spiritual discernment regarding whether to use this resource will pave the way for a more faithful engagement in this process.

We recommend the following process of spiritual discernment. It would be ideal if this process began when a new class of elders started their work, but that may not be the case.

**First Session Meeting:** Introduce the Resource

- The idea of this tool is introduced.
- Session members are provided a copy, and asked to skim through it, particularly reading the Introduction between the first and second meeting.

**Second Session Meeting:** Deeply Discuss...Followed By a Month of Prayer

- The Session discusses this resource with the following questions:
  - Does this look like a relevant resource for us to use at this time in our congregation’s life? Are we ready for this? If not, what would we need to do to be ready?
  - What do you like about the idea of doing this process as outlined in this tool?
  - What do you *not* like about the idea of doing this process as outlined in this tool?
  - What are the possible benefits to us as Session members and the church if we were to faithfully do this process?
  - What might be possible outcomes, both negative and positive?
  - If we decide to do this process, are we each willing to commit both the time within our Session meetings AND the personal time between meetings to faithfully do this process?
- The Session has this discussion, then commits to pray for God’s guidance between this and the next Session meeting regarding the possibility of entering this process together.

### **Third Session Meeting: Make a Decision**

- Discuss:
  - What draws me to this process?
  - What does not draw me to this process?
  - What do I discern is God's leading in this matter?
  
- Make a decision regarding the use of this process

### **If Yes, Next Session Meeting: Prepare For Launch**

- Prepare for the kick-off of this process by:
  1. Identifying the roles described in the following section
  
  2. Laying plans for a date and possible off-site location for *Gathering One*
  
  3. Discussing *Appendix A: Effective Meetings*, to see what changes the Session might need to make in how they go about conducting their meetings to make room for this process.

### **Abridged version of discernment:**

You need some time devoted during at least two Session meetings before beginning this process. In the first meeting, the Session is presented with this resource, what it is and why the person bringing it forward thinks it would be helpful at this time. Time for discussion is allowed for people to voice why they are drawn to it, why they are not drawn to it. Time between meeting one and two is allowed, in which each session member is encouraged to skim through this resource and pray for God's guidance regarding engaging in this process. At the second meeting, the Session again discusses and comes to a decision regarding use of this resource.

Then plans are put in place to begin the process at the following meeting (or a subsequent meeting). *Gathering One* is designed to be a longer time; therefore the Session will need to plan for that. This might mean a delay of a few meetings until this time can be carved out, given the seasons of the church year (i.e. summer people are gone; December is lost to Christmas, etc.)

## Keep In Mind...

- **Gathering One and Ten are unique.** The first and last gathering invite deeper sharing, so the Session needs to plan for this additional time. The gatherings in between ask for a shorter amount of time—the first 45 minutes of your regularly scheduled meeting.
- **Session meetings will need to change.** Our experience has been that elders long for their Session meetings to be spiritually energizing rather than energy draining. They long to leave the meeting feeling enthusiastic versus dispirited. There are many factors at work that make it difficult to have the type of meetings we want. One factor is the many challenges our churches now face in the contemporary world. Churches are working harder for less impact and that leads to despair. We seek to address this.

The second factor is the way that churches get into a *modus operandi* of how they conduct meetings, and this makes it hard for any one person or pastor to lead change. Therefore, this process invites Sessions to do their work differently. Initially this means carving the space for the 45 minutes this process requires from each regularly scheduled Session meeting. Therefore, the Session will need to do work differently and/or more efficiently. *Appendix A: Effective Meetings* gives suggestions for how Sessions could examine the way they do work and how they might make more room for this process in their meetings. A Session may want to spend time at a meeting BEFORE starting the process to discuss Appendix A and what changes they might make into “they way we do things around here.”

## Definition of Terms Used in this Process:

**Discussion Leader:** The person who leads the discussion. This could be the pastor as moderator of the Session. Or the pastor could decide to delegate the discussion leading function to other Session members at various points in the process.

**Shepherd of the Process:** A person other than the pastor who provides follow-up between meetings. This person reminds elders (via email, conversation, etc.) to get their homework done in between meetings. They see to details before and after

meetings that enables the Session to faithfully implement this process.

**Homework:** Activities or reflection questions to be done in between Session meetings. Each Session meeting ends with looking at the assigned homework to be done between this and the next meeting, and discussing what is being asked for in order to check for clarity. “Do we understand what is being asked of us?”

## **Notes:**



# Gathering 1: Bearing Fruit

## Purpose:

This session introduces the theme passage for this 12 month process, John 15. For today, the passage frames a more extended time of reflection on how the church has borne fruit in the past, particularly in terms of how God has worked in this church and in leaders' lives.

This first session is designed to take three hours, and could be a whole evening or a ½ day session event:

## Materials Needed:

- € Blank paper and pens, one per person
- € A means to write so all can see. (Whiteboard, butcher paper/ pens, projection, etc.)
- € Copies of generic covenant.
- € Copy of John 15:1-17 per person.
- € Copy of "Our Life Together" reflection questions written out for people to see.

**Preparation:** As the facilitator, invite others into a time of prayer. Ask God to open us up to new possibilities as a church and as individuals.

## Scripture and Reflection: (30 minutes)

Read John 15:1-17

Definition of a•bide [uh-bahyd]

### Verb (used without object)

1. to remain; continue; stay: Abide with me.
2. to have one's abode; dwell; reside.
3. to continue in a particular condition, attitude, relationship, etc.; last.

○ **Verb (used with object)**

1. to put up with; tolerate; stand: I can't abide dishonesty!
2. to endure, sustain, or withstand without yielding or submitting: to abide a vigorous onslaught.
3. to wait for; await: to abide the coming of the Lord.
4. to accept without opposition or question: to abide the verdict of the judges.
5. to pay the price or penalty of; suffer for.

○ **Verb phrase**

1. abide by,
    - a. to act in accord with.
    - b. to submit to; agree to: to abide by the court's decision.
    - c. to remain steadfast or faithful to; keep: If you make a promise, abide by it.
- Which definition of "abide" best describes your relationship with Jesus?
  - What does it mean to abide with each other as Session members together...in your work...in this process you are launching today?
  - How God has abided with you this past week in your joys and your hardships?

*"Jesus says, 'I appointed you to go & bear fruit, fruit that will last.'"*

In the remainder of Gathering One you will reflect on how you have seen God work in your church bearing fruit through your life together. You will be asked to reflect on particular times when you felt engaged in the fruit bearing work of this church.

Facilitator transitions into the next segment with this prayer:  
*“Gracious God, you have abided with us through many times, personally and as a church. You have nurtured us, sustained us, and called us to bear fruit. We pause and give you thanks for your Spirit’s work among us. Lead us now into a fruitful reflection of your presence and work among us.”*

## **Our Life Together** (75 minutes)

(If time is shorter, choose only question 1 or 2)

Reflection: Give each participant a piece of blank paper. Have them spend 10 minutes alone, journaling the answer to these two questions:

**Question 1:** Reflecting on your entire experience at our church, recall a time when you felt the most engaged, alive, and motivated. Who was involved? What did you do? How did it feel? What happened?\*

**Question 2:** When you consider all of your experiences at our church, what has contributed most to your spiritual life? What relationships or programs or events have been most helpful in fostering the congregation’s relationship with God? Tell me what has made a difference and how that has happened.\*

Call the Session back, and have them each share their answers to these questions. Everyone shares their answer to Question 1 first, and then everyone shares on Question 2. Have a person other than the facilitator take notes in a way so all can see, just noting a brief, descriptive synopsis.

**Key Learnings:** After everyone has shared, ask the group: What themes emerged from our discussion? Have the clerk/secretary for the meeting write these down for future reference.

**Prayer:** Spend some time in prayer closing this time, inviting any who want to pray to thank God for how God has worked in this congregation.

\*Questions are from Mark Lau Branson's book, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change*, Alban Institute, 2004.

**Covenant Creation:** (45 minutes) (Note, the Session could also discuss and create their covenant at a prior meeting in preparation for the process.)

Read and review the suggested covenant provided for this process in *Appendix A: Generic Covenant*.

What questions do people have about the covenant? (Preferably this is not the first time the Session has seen this covenant. It is ideal to discuss questions about this covenant at a Session meeting in which your session decided whether to engage in this process. If not, you need to do so now and allow more time for this.)

What ideas, if any, from *Appendix B: Strategies for Effective Meetings* would you add to this covenant to help you foster efficient and satisfying meetings throughout this process?

Is there anything else you would like to add to or change in this covenant?



**Ending prayer:** *“We commit ourselves as leaders to you, O God and to this process. Bless us as we give our energy, time, and imagination to you. May this be a tool for our renewed abiding with you and bearing fruit. Give us your Spirit’s power to follow through on our intentions today. Give us grace when we fail. Guide us in our discussions. May our efforts in the homework deepen our conversation and our learning in between our meetings. Meet us in this process, abide with us. AMEN.”*

**Homework Assignment for Next Meeting:** (10 minutes)

Between now and the next meeting talk to one person within the church and one person outside the church and ask them, “What comes to mind when you hear the name ‘Jesus?’”



## Gathering 2: Who Do You Say That I Am?

### **Purpose:**

*To explore your understanding of who Jesus is for you. While this may seem like an easy task, it will require you to put aside easy theological descriptions and look deeper into the role Jesus has played in your life.*

**Preparation:** Designate two or three Elders to pray for the meeting and discussion.

### **Scripture and Reflection:**

Read Matthew 16:13-17

How would you answer the following questions posed to Peter?

1. Who do others say that Jesus is?
  
2. Who do *you* say that Jesus is? (if possible try to avoid “churchy” language like Messiah, Savior, Lord, etc. Be sure to help others understand what you mean by this and how that impacts your understanding of Jesus.)

### **Content and Homework Discussion:**

1. How would your life be different if Jesus were not a part of your life, family, job?

2. During your homework, you were asked to talk to one person within the church and one person outside the church about who Jesus is to them. Share your experience and what differences, if any, there were.
  
3. Have everyone share, “How does your understanding of Jesus impact what your church does, how it worships, how it interacts with those outside your church?”

**Prayer:** Spend a moment in silence. Invite 2 or 3 elders to pray.

- One person gives thanks for the gift and presence of Jesus Christ in our life together.
- The second one prays for those who have been faithful servants of Jesus Christ.
- The next person prays for those who have yet to come to faith in Jesus Christ and how your church might be a part of the mission to bring those who do not yet know to partake in the glory of what we have already received.

**Session Business:** As you go through your Session meeting, look for ways that your understanding of Jesus informs the discussion you have and the decisions you make.

**Aha! Moments and Key Learnings:** How did your understanding of Jesus inform the discussions and decisions made during tonight’s meeting? Take five minutes and have your clerk record what you have learned tonight.

**Homework Assignment for Next Meeting:** List the number of ministries and programs that happen on your church property versus how many ministries and programs happen away from the church property.

### **Prayer and Covenant Renewal Commitment (together)**

*“We commit ourselves as leaders to you, O God and to this process. Bless us as we give our energy, time, and imagination to you. May our efforts be a tool for our renewed abiding with you and bearing fruit. Give us your Spirit’s power to follow through on our intentions today. Give us grace when we fail. Guide us in our discussions. May our efforts in the homework deepen our conversation and our learning in between our meetings. Meet us in this process, abide with us. AMEN.”*



## Gathering 3: The Church's Purpose

**Purpose:** To reflect on the reality of the Church as a sent people to the world God is trying to reach.

**Preparation:** As a group, pray and ask that God would send the Holy Spirit to your meeting and that you would be aware of the Spirit's presence. Take time to be quiet and allow this prayer to sink in.

**Scripture and Reflection:** (10 minutes)

Read John 20:19-23

1. If Jesus were to walk into our meeting and say, "Peace!" How might you respond?
  
2. Which of the following statements of Jesus piques your interest and why?

*"As the Father has sent me, I send you."*

-or-

*"Receive the Holy Spirit."*

3. How does it affect you to know that you are being sent into the world by the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit?

## **Content and Homework Discussion:** (25 minutes)

1. Do you see your church as more of a gathering place or as a sending place?
2. Name some of the ways your church acts as a *sent people*.
3. What are some of the barriers that keep your church from being a *sent people*?
4. What might it mean for us to understand the church as a *sent people* rather than as a building or institution or a series of programs?
5. How might your church look different if it were focused on sending people?

## **Prayer time:** (5 -10 minutes)

Take time to pray that God will increase your awareness of being sent into the community and world around you both personally and corporately. Pray that God would reveal to each person a circumstance, person, or place that they need to go to and express Jesus' love.

**Session Business:** Observe how much of your time is spent discussing ministry to the congregation versus ministry with those outside the congregation.

**Aha! Moments and Key Learnings:** During this meeting did God show you anything new or surprising about the nature of your church and its ministry? Take five minutes and have your clerk record what you have learned tonight.

**Homework Assignment for Next Meeting:** Write 2-3 sentences defining “what it means to be the church.”

**Prayer and Covenant Renewal Commitment:** (together)

*“We commit ourselves as leaders to you, O God and to this process. Bless us as we give our energy, time, and imagination to you. May our efforts be a tool for our renewed abiding with you and bearing fruit. Give us your Spirit’s power to follow through on our intentions today. Give us grace when we fail. Guide us in our discussions. May our efforts in the homework deepen our conversation and our learning in between our meetings. Meet us in this process, abide with us. AMEN.”*



## Gathering 4: Risk-Taking

**Purpose:** To consider the “risks” of being church.

**Preparation:** Have each person thank God out-loud for the person on their right. This can be a very simple prayer using the words, “Thank you God for \_\_\_\_\_.”

**Scripture and Reflection:** (10 minutes)

Read together Acts 2:14-21; 37-47

1. What did Peter risk when he raised his voice and spoke to the crowd?
2. What did the people who became a part of this church risk when they shared their possessions, homes, and time?

**Content and Homework Discussion:** (25 minutes)

1. Share your 2 or 3 sentences from your homework defining for you, “What is the church?”

*How do the definitions you heard from each other compare to what the leadership of the church described in Acts 2 might have written if they were given this assignment?*

2. What do you risk when you stand up in some way and share the Good News of Jesus?
3. What do you risk when you truly hold “all things in common” by opening up your home to others, sharing your resources, praying together and opening up even your inner thoughts to others?



4. What are some ways you believe God is challenging your church to risk?

**Prayer time:** (5-10 minutes)

Review the agenda for the rest of the meeting. What are the possible risks? What are the controversial issues that discussing them might risk relationships? Assign people to pray for the various agenda items and ask at least 2 or 3 to pray that as a session you will be able to risk and lead the people of God to risk.

**Session Business:** When appropriate, ask the elders to consider Acts 2:42 and how the life of that church can be an example on the direction and decision of this church.

**Aha! Moments and Key Learnings:** What risks did we take today? Take five minutes and have your clerk record what you have learned tonight.

**Homework Assignment for Next Meeting:**

Write your thoughts on the following questions:

1. When you think about how our church has related to your community and to the world, what do you think has been most important?

2. When you are at your best, how do you express God's love and mercy and justice to others?

3. What have been your own most important experiences in relating to others beyond your own church?

**Prayer and Covenant Renewal Commitment:** (together)

*"We commit ourselves as leaders to you, O God and to this process. Bless us as we give our energy, time, and imagination to you. May our efforts be a tool for our renewed abiding with you and bearing fruit. Give us your Spirit's power to follow through on our intentions today. Give us grace when we fail. Guide us in our discussions. May our efforts in the homework deepen our conversation and our learning in between our meetings. Meet us in this process, abide with us. AMEN."*



## Gathering 5: Bearing Fruit in Our Community

**Purpose:** To reflect on the way your church has borne fruit in the community and/or context in which God has placed your church.

**Preparation:** Take a moment to reflect on those people who have been instrumental in your own faith journey. Go around the room and have people thank God for the people God has used to bring them closer to Christ.

**Scripture and Reflection:** (10 minutes)

Read John 15:1-17

Jesus appointed us to bear fruit, fruit that will last.

1. What is fruit? What is Jesus referring to in this image?
  
2. Jesus says bearing fruit brings glory to God in the world and shows us to be God's disciples. How is this so?

**Content and Homework Discussion:** (25 minutes)

Share your responses to the homework question. (As with opening event, have someone other than the discussion leader bullet summaries of the answers on paper for all to see.)

1. When you think about how your church has related to your community and to the world, what do you think has been most important?
2. When you are at your best, how do you express God's love and mercy and justice to others?
3. What have been your own most important experiences in relating to others beyond your own church?
4. What themes emerge in these answers? Could you summarize them in three categories?

**Prayer time:** (5-10 minutes)

Spend time in prayer, thanking God for your ways the church has borne fruit in your community.

**Session Business:** Throughout the meeting be aware of the benefit(s) our ministries provide for the community.

**Aha! Moments and Key Learnings:** In what ways did our meeting nurture the fruit we bear in our church and community? Take five minutes and have your clerk record what you have learned tonight.

**Homework Assignment for Next Meeting:**

1. Go into a grocery store, a library, a school—make mental notes about how you think that experience is different now than it was when you were 12 years old.

2. Read the article “The World is Changing”  
(Appendix C)

**Prayer and Covenant Renewal Commitment:** (together)

*“We commit ourselves as leaders to you, O God and to this process. Bless us as we give our energy, time, and imagination to you. May our efforts be a tool for our renewed abiding with you and bearing fruit. Give us your Spirit’s power to follow through on our intentions today. Give us grace when we fail. Guide us in our discussions. May our efforts in the homework deepen our conversation and our learning in between our meetings. Meet us in this process, abide with us.  
AMEN.”*



## Gathering 6: The World is Changing

**Purpose:** To become aware of the changes that are happening within the world, and to consider how those changes affect and inform the way we are the Church in the world.

### Materials needed:

- € Reading for homework
- € Newsprint or a way to record information for all to see (white board, projection etc.)
- € Markers as needed.

**Preparation:** Invite everyone to place their hands in an open position, then have the leader pray:

*“Lord, we pray to be open to what you want us to hear during this time. We pray to be open to what you want us to see during this time. We pray to be open to what you want us to be as a church. (Follow with a time of silence) Amen.”*

### Scripture and Reflection: (10 minutes)

Read Exodus 16:1-12

The children of Israel were in unfamiliar territory... everything their eyes could see looked different and felt different than what they had known before. They longed to go back to something familiar, even though it was not the best thing for them, nor was it God’s desire for them.

1. Does your church ever feel like it is in unfamiliar territory in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How or why?

2. If God didn't take the children of Israel back to the place from which they came, God is not likely to take your church to the place and time from which it came. What did God do for the Israelites instead? What do you think that would look like for your church today—what are God's provisions for you in this journey through unfamiliar territory?

### **Content and Homework Discussion: (25 minutes)**

There is a children's rhyme about going on a bear hunt. Every time the hunter encounters a barrier, the refrain is: "Can't go over it, can't go under it, gotta go through it."

If God is not going to steer us away from this new territory, then we are going to have to go through it. And if we are God's people sent into this world, we need to be aware of the realities of this world into which we are sent.

#### **Exercise Number 1:**

Invite the leaders to raise their hand if they have been overseas since the last meeting. Now, raise their hand if they have talked on the phone to someone overseas since the last meeting. Now raise their hand if they have intersected with e-mail, fax, or web site from overseas since the last meeting. Now, raise their hand if they have encountered a person of a different nationality in the local community since the last meeting—we are the church in a time of increasing globalization. Just a couple of decades ago years, we lived in much more homogeneous neighborhoods, we had much less interactions with other nationalities and worldviews, and we were not nearly as intertwined economically, socially, or technologically with other cultures. Now, we are in an era of globalization.

## Exercise Number 2:

Put up newsprint with the heading: “Our changing world.” Under that heading, write “globalization.” Ask the Session to consider their homework—both their visit and their reading. Invite people to name things about the world that have changed, and write those onto the newsprint.

## Discussion:

1. What trends most affect our church?
2. What trends have we been ignoring in our ministry?
3. Which of these trends most excite you about the possibilities/opportunities they bring to our church?

**Prayer time:** (5-10 minutes)

Divide into groups of 3 to pray in small groups:



- 1 person will pray a prayer of confession—confessing the ways that their church has been like the Israelites, wishing to go back to Egypt instead of follow God into unfamiliar territory.
- 1 person will pray a prayer of thanksgiving—for insights that have occurred during this conversation.
- 1 person will pray a prayer of discernment—inviting God to guide, lead, challenge the Session as it wrestles with possibilities and opportunities of ministry in this changing world.

**Session Business:** Observe during this meeting the moments where the Session is tempted to “return to Egypt” or decides “We’ve gotta go through it.”

**Aha! Moments and Key Learnings:** Did the Session surprise you with any of its decisions? Take five minutes and have your clerk record what you have learned tonight.

### **Homework Assignment for Next Meeting:**

As you discovered in Session three, the church is called to be “sent” into the world. The homework for the next Session will gently introduce you to how you might begin to explore your community and understand how those who are in your community might see you and how you might not really know them.

Using the “Exploring Your Neighborhood: An Exegetical Walk” (Appendix D), choose a time where you won’t be rushed to finish and follow the instructions.

Spend time reflecting on your observations during the “Walk” and write a brief summary of what you observed, heard and

learned, include confirmations of what you already knew and highlight moments that were surprising to you. What did you learn about your neighborhood/city/church that the rest of the Session should know?

### **Prayer and Covenant Renewal Commitment: (together)**

*“We commit ourselves as leaders to you, O God and to this process. Bless us as we give our energy, time, and imagination to you. May our efforts be a tool for our renewed abiding with you and bearing fruit. Give us your Spirit’s power to follow through on our intentions today. Give us grace when we fail. Guide us in our discussions. May our efforts in the homework deepen our conversation and our learning in between our meetings. Meet us in this process, abide with us. AMEN.”*



## Gathering 7: For Those We Have Yet to Meet

**Purpose:** To consider those outside the walls of our building and how we might be called to reach them.

**Preparation:** Bring a bunch of random pictures of people in and around the community. Also bring a map of your community. Place them in the center of the Session meeting. Give people a chance to look over it and then invite the elders to pray for the community they've been entrusted with. Ask God to give you a heart for those you have yet to meet.

### Scripture and Reflection:

Read Luke 14:15-24

*Jesus was constantly spending time with people who were considered outside the socially acceptable. The parable highlights an emphasis of Jesus ministry to the broader world, especially those marginalized by the church.*

1. How does the parable challenge the church's tendency to serve its own interests versus those outside the church?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What would it mean for you to consciously spend more time with those outside the church than those inside the church?

## **Content and Homework Reflection:**

For this session, you were asked to begin to engage your community. You were asked to look at your neighborhood with new eyes and speak with community people about challenges and unmet needs in the community and their knowledge or perception of your church.

1. What surprised you the most? What did you hear or see that you had not heard before?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What were some of the community impressions of your congregation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. In your interviews or exegesis, what unmet needs or opportunities did you see or hear that might be a possible way for your church to engage the community in a helpful way?

## **Prayer:**

Review the agenda for the rest of the meeting. How are we reaching the community around us? What opportunities might there be for us? Invite 2-3 people to pray for God to open our eyes to be able to see the possibilities and to pray for what God's mission in our community might look like.

**Session meeting:** Throughout the meeting periodically consider the people you meet in the community were sitting next to you.

**Aha! Moments and Key Learnings:** Where did the community outside the walls of the church impact the conversations and business done during the meeting? Take five minutes and have your clerk record what you have learned tonight.

**Homework for next Session:**

Write your responses to these questions:

1. Have you ever cut-away or removed something unwanted to achieve something greater? Did it work?
2. Have you ever had to let go of some part of your life in order to move forward? What was that like?
3. Can you think of something that your church has had to let go of in order to move forward?

## **Prayer and Covenant Renewal Commitment: (together)**

*“We commit ourselves as leaders to you, O God and to this process. Bless us as we give our energy, time, and imagination to you. May our efforts be a tool for our renewed abiding with you and bearing fruit. Give us your Spirit’s power to follow through on our intentions today. Give us grace when we fail. Guide us in our discussions. May our efforts in the homework deepen our conversation and our learning in between our meetings. Meet us in this process, abide with us. AMEN.”*



## Gathering 8: Making Room for New Opportunities

**Purpose:** We will explore how God can make room in us to embrace new opportunities.

**Preparation:** In this time of preparation we want to release this gathering into God's hands. In your prayers, sit with your hands cupped. Consider all the things that come to your mind and visualize putting them in your hands. When your hands are full, hand off your concerns into God's waiting hands. Ask God to hold your concerns for you in the following minutes.

**Scripture and Reflection:** (10 minutes)

Read John 15:1-17

Definition:

prune<sup>2</sup> | prun | | proun |

**verb** [ trans. ]

- trim (a tree, shrub, or bush) by cutting away dead or overgrown branches or stems, esp. to increase fruitfulness and growth.
- cut away (a branch or stem) in this way : *prune back* the branches.
- reduce the extent of (something) by removing superfluous or unwanted parts : *reduction achieved by working harder or pruning costs.*
- remove (superfluous or unwanted parts) from something : *Elliot deliberately pruned away* details.

1. How does pruning enable a plant, such as tomatoes, bear more abundant fruit?
2. Have you ever cut-away or removed something unwanted to achieve something greater? Did it work?
3. Have you ever had to let go of some part of your life in order to move forward? What was that like?

**Content and Homework Discussion:** (25 minutes)

1. What has your church let go of in the past in order to move forward?
2. If we were to live into the definition of the church as the sent people of God, what would we need to leave behind?



3. As you reflect on your neighborhood exegesis, who is missing from your church? How might you make room for them?
  
4. What activities and/or practices would need to shift in order to redirect your focus?

**Prayer time:** (5-10 minutes)

Read in unison: *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”*  
Psalm 139:23-24.

Pray the following from *Ignatius’ Awareness Examen*.

*Provident God, thank you for all the ways you have blessed us this day. You know us better than we know ourselves. Please help us to become more aware of how you have been working in us and around us during the past hours. We wish to respond to your call with love and faithfulness. We can do this only to the degree we recognize your guidance. Help us then to become more sensitive to your Spirit’s direction and more conscious of the ways we fail to respond.*

**Session Business:** As you move through the meeting, ask: *“Is this something we keep or can we let it go?”*

**Aha! Moments and Key Learnings:** Did God shed any light on what you may need to let go of in order to do what the Spirit is asking you to do? Take five minutes and have your clerk record what you have learned tonight.

### **Homework Assignment for Next Meeting:**

Team up with another elder and invite one or two people that neither of you know well from your church to have a meal with you. Tell them, “We have an assignment as elders to have a meal with someone from our church and I would be honored if you would have a meal with us.” This might seem like a strange assignment but it will make sense next time you meet.

### **Prayer and Covenant Renewal Commitment: (together)**

*“We commit ourselves as leaders to you, O God and to this process. Bless us as we give our energy, time, and imagination to you. May our efforts be a tool for our renewed abiding with you and bearing fruit. Give us your Spirit’s power to follow through on our intentions today. Give us grace when we fail. Guide us in our discussions. May our efforts in the homework deepen our conversation and our learning in between our meetings. Meet us in this process, abide with us. AMEN.”*



## Gathering 9: Community Building Community

**Purpose:** To consider the connection between ministry and relationships.

**Preparation:** Take time to break up into groups of three. Have each person check-in. Say a word or phrase that describes your life with Christ. Pray for the person to your right. When all are done, gather for your Session meeting.

**Scripture and Reflection:** (10 minutes)

Read together Luke 10:1-12

1. What would be your biggest challenge if you were one of the 72 Jesus called?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. When Jesus had them go without food, money, or a hotel reservation what did it force the 72 to do?

3. Who would you want to be your partner in ministry if Jesus gave you that assignment today?

**Content and Homework Discussion:** (25 minutes)

*Have people share their responses to the following questions:*

1. Tell who you took out for a meal from your homework. How did you feel asking them to join you for a meal? What do you think the person you asked to join you for a meal was expecting? Has your relationship with that person changed in any way since you had that meal together?
2. What is the power of spending time with someone? How does God use relationships to change lives?
3. How would your community be different if once a month each of you partnered with another elder to take one person from your community out to lunch?

**Prayer time:** (5-10 minutes)

Write down the name of one person God has placed on your heart. As a group pray for the names that you have written down.

**Session Business:** Keep a tally of the discussion as to how many items were about relationships between church members, how many items were about relationships between the church members and the community, and how many items were not about relationships at all.

**Aha Moments and Key Learnings:** How has the business of the Session today furthered relationships between your church members and the community? Take five minutes and have your clerk record what you have learned tonight.

**Homework Assignment for Next Meeting:**

Have the clerk share and distribute the Aha! Moments/Key Learnings reflections from the previous meetings. Consider if there are themes or trends or directions that can be discerned from these learnings.

**Prayer and Covenant Renewal Commitment: (together)**

*“We commit ourselves as leaders to you, O God and to this process. Bless us as we give our energy, time, and imagination to you. May our efforts be a tool for our renewed abiding with you and bearing fruit. Give us your Spirit’s power to follow through on our intentions today. Give us grace when we fail. Guide us in our discussions. May our efforts in the homework deepen our conversation and our learning in between our meetings. Meet us in this process, abide with us. AMEN.”*



## Gathering 10: Looking to the Future

**Purpose:** Today's session is intentionally longer in order to explore more closely the journey you've been on over the past months and look forward to what next steps that you might take.

*\*\*This Session should take up the bulk of your meeting, approximately 1½-2 hours. Make sure you are aware of this need and plan for your business accordingly. You may want to have a separate meeting to work through this session or suspend your business items for a month to ensure your full time and attentions are available.*

### **Preparation:**

Pray the following from *Ignatius' Awareness Examen*.

*Provident God, thank you for all the ways you have blessed us this day. You know us better than we know ourselves. Please help us to become more aware of how you have been working in us and around us during the past hours. We wish to respond to your call with love and faithfulness. We can do this only to the degree we recognize your guidance. Help us then to become more sensitive to your Spirit's direction and more conscious of the ways we fail to respond.*

### **Scripture and Reflection:**

Read Acts 1:6-11

1. The Disciples anticipated that something big was about to happen when they met with Jesus following the resurrection. Describe a time when you had a hopeful expectation that God was about to do something big in your life?

2. The task set out before the disciple was a very large one. When have you felt that you had a seemingly impossible task set before you and how did you respond?

3. The Disciples are left alone, gazing into the sky as Jesus ascends. Share a time when you felt you had been left alone and needed some guidance to continue your journey?

### **Content and Homework Discussion:**

As you come to the end of the process, you may be feeling a mixture of anticipation (what's next? we're ready!), of being overwhelmed (wow, this is a big job!) or feeling left alone (who's going to help us?). If so, well done, good and faithful servant!

*Today, you will **Gather Insights, Assess Risks, and Define Leadership** as you look forward to Module Two and your next steps. Keep track of what people say and collect them for future reference.*

➤ **Gather Insights**

- Make sure each person has a copy of the “Key Learnings” writing pieces from the previous nine gatherings.

➤ Over the course of the last months, what have you learned that you do not want to lose as you move forward to Module 2?

➤ Where has the Holy Spirit moved through the process to open you up to different possibilities?

➤ **Assess the Risks**

1. What is the energy level that the Session might have to try new things that might be risky and challenge long held patterns of congregational life?



2. Module 2 takes you deeper into interacting and engaging a wider conversation with key church leaders as well as your community. What do you perceive will be barriers to engaging this deeper conversation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What particular opportunities seem possible now that didn't a year ago? What might you do with those opportunities?

➤ **Define Leadership**

Leadership is a critical element to the church. Leaders who understand the risky nature of the church, are spiritually mature, are willing to take risks, and willing to submit their leadership to the leading of the Holy Spirit are essential to a church that moves into the future.

1. What are the qualities you look for in a leader of your church and are they different then when you started this process? What qualities do you think you will need to move this church into the future?
  
2. Who needs to be a part of the next module? Who does not? Who would be a barrier (including yourself) that would prevent this church from moving forward?
  
3. Who is missing from the leadership team? Who would you recommend be a part of Module 2?

4. Module 2 should include around 20% of your worship attendance. Make a list of these key leaders and design a way to invite them into Module 2 discussions. You might also ask those whom you identified to identify who they see as leaders in the church and add those names to your module 2 group.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Who from the Session will participate in the Module 2 group or will the whole session participate?

**Next Steps:**

Our hope is that the way you have operated as a Session has been positively impacted through the integration of prayer and Scripture reflection as a integral part of your meeting. How will you continue to make this an important part of the spiritual life of your Session?

## **Prayer time:** (5-10 Min)

Pray the following from *Ignatius' Awareness Examen*.

Pray this out loud and follow your reading with a time of silence, putting the future in God's hands.

*Faithful God, with hope we look to the future. You accept us the way we are but also call us to grow. You give us time and opportunity and grace. We place the time between now and next gathering in your hands. We ask you to help us be more sensitive to the Spirit's presence and guidance. We ask your special help in the areas where you asking us to go. God, with the Spirit within our hearts, we go forward with joy and trust. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

## **Homework Assignment for Next Meeting:**

Prepare for Module 2.

1. Invite those key leaders you've identified and work toward creating a group that comprises at least 20% of your weekly worship attendance.
2. Commit to continued prayer and study of scripture during future Session meeting as well as intentional prayer for God's mission in your community.

## **Prayer and Covenant Renewal Commitment:**

**Blessing said together:** May God's love for us be reflected in our commitment to each other on the journey as we seek to be faithful to our covenant and calling. Amen.



## **Appendix I-A: Generic Covenant**

We covenant together to engage our time, energy, and imagination in the process of Module One: Prepare.

Specifically, we promise to:

1. Engage faithfully in the suggested discussions during our Session meetings.
2. Read the Scripture provided, do the homework, and come prepared for our next meeting.
3. Pray daily for God's guidance of our Session during this process.
4. Individually and corporately do our part to make Session meetings more efficient.

In doing our part to make Session meetings more efficient and satisfying, we commit to these behaviors/changes:

(See Appendix B: Strategies for More Effective Meetings, for possible ideas here.)



## **Appendix I-B: Strategies for an Effective Meeting**

What makes for an effective meeting?

Enough structure to enable clarity, direction, and task accomplishment.

Enough space for God to be present and work among us.

Enough room for all to participate and have voice.

Enough follow-throughs to empower fruitful action outside of the meeting.

This process will increase the space for God to be present and work among your Session. Thus, how do you improve the structure, room for all to participate and follow-through, such that your work effectively continues?

### **Checklist of behaviors you could consider for inclusion in your covenant:**

- ✓ All group members offer leadership by attempting to summarize what the group or a person is saying.
- ✓ Offer my thoughts more readily if I tend to be quiet; leave more space for others to offer their thoughts if I tend to talk easily.
- ✓ Do my part to keep the discussion on track.
- ✓ Not interrupt one another!
- ✓ Practice deep listening to one another (listen to understand, not just quietly formulate my next thought to share).
- ✓ Offer restatement of what others said to indicate that I heard and check for accuracy.

- ✓ Ask questions of others to clarify what I heard.

What structural pieces could enable a more effective meeting and follow-through?

**1. A clear agenda, which is emailed out ahead of time.**

This enables people to see what's coming and structure the conversation better on site. The more the agenda reflects the unique items for that evening the better. People are more efficient when they see what items need to be discussed in that Session.

**2. Consent Docket and Prior Reports**

If people can read reports before hand, this is a big help. We've heard elders complain about how boring and repetitive it is to have people read their committee reports at each Session meeting. In addition, each report could have consent items. This assumes they will be read, and then all consent items approved with one motion. There is always freedom to take an item on the consent docket and move it to an item for discussion.

Thus, each committee report could be organized by two categories:

- Consent items (or FYI, For Your Information only)
- Items to be discussed.

**3. Look for "Off-Line" discussion items that**

spontaneously occur during the meeting. "Off-line" discussion items are things that only need to be discussed between a few people, and not the whole Session. So these discussions could more efficiently happen "off-line," i.e. after the meeting, in between the meeting, etc. Usually it is the people who don't need to be part of the discussion who are most able to see what's happening in the moment. They could then suggest or ask, "Is this a discussion that could be done "off-line"? If there is a common language for this and permission given for suggesting this, it can free everyone up to help each other out.

#### **4. Minutes reflect WHO will do WHAT by WHEN**

This enables better follow-through between meetings. Often follow-through doesn't happen because we all have a tendency to forget what we said we'd do in the moment of the meeting. The clerk could embed these throughout the minutes, or make a summary at the end: "Action Items." The "Shepherd" for the process could also help jog people's memories about key things that were to be done between meetings. This written reminder is usually most effective if people receive the minutes or the summary of action items within a week after the meeting (or by mid-month). If minutes cannot be done that quickly, perhaps the Session has a separate "Action Items for the Month" that comes out within a week.





## Appendix I-C: The World is Changing

“I feel like I’m living in the last days of the Roman Empire. Do you ever feel that way?” This was not a conversation in a history class or a seminar. It was a conversation between two parents at their children’s neighborhood sporting event. The world is changing, and people are talking about it. But are our churches talking about it? Unfortunately, many churches have taken the position: “Everything else around me is changing... the one thing I can count on staying the same is my church.” Churches may choose to ignore the changes happening in the culture around them, but they do so at their own peril. Ministry always takes place in the midst of culture, and if we don’t pay attention to the changes around us, we risk becoming irrelevant to the people and the needs around us. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. However, the culture with whom we share that gospel message is changing, so we must pay attention to the culture in order to know better how to engage the culture.

To begin to think about the rapid changes happening in our time, I invite you to get on the internet and watch a video on You Tube called “Did You Know 3.0”

[youtube.com/watch?v=jpEnFwiqdx8&feature=fvst](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpEnFwiqdx8&feature=fvst)

This will already be outdated when you watch it, but it will give you a glimpse of the changing nature of our world.

The question for us as Christians is: how do we communicate the good news of Jesus Christ in the culture in which we live?

### **Globalization**

The world is more interconnected than ever before. American communities that once were homogenous are now full of diverse peoples from all over the globe. Our public schools are full of children who speak English as a second language. With the advent of air travel, the world became smaller and

people were able to go from one part of the globe to another in a day. Now, one can get on the internet and have an instant conversation with someone halfway across the world. Global realities are shifting away from superpowers and into a new balance of powers that require a new way of relating to one another. Trade and financial markets are globally interwoven.

## **Information**

With the advent of the printing press, information was able to get into the hands of the masses. Today we have access to more information in one day than we once faced in a lifetime. With 24/7 news cycles and the internet at our fingertips, we are barraged with more information than we can possibly manage.

## **Communication**

Communication has radically changed over the last 50 years. Letters, telegrams, the big 3 television networks, and rotary telephones have given way to e-mail, cell phones, websites, social networking, cable TV, and text messaging. Communication is constant and instantaneous. Where once face to face communication was the norm, the vast amount of communication today is done “virtually.”

## **Two-Income Families**

50 years ago, the norm was for men to be breadwinners and women to be homemakers. In most American families today, both parents work outside the home, changing the dynamics of family life and volunteerism in the church. The reality today is that many children spend their days in day care or group settings, and the evening meal together as a family is becoming rarer. As companies downsize, work hours are becoming longer as fewer people do more work. Where once employees stayed with one company their whole career, employees today are likely to move around from job opportunity to job opportunity.

## **Post Christendom**

Christianity, though still influential in a cross-section of Western culture, is not as prevalent as it once was. The Christian story is no longer acknowledged or integrated as a focal point in life.

Christians (or active “church goers”) no longer make up the majority of people in local neighborhoods. More Americans are reading the paper in a coffee shop on Sunday morning than are in a Christian worship service. Many people who trust and follow Jesus Christ no longer feel like they are at home in culture but now experience what it feels like to be counter-cultural. For the first time in many centuries, people in culture at large do not know the story of faith or even aspects of it that were seen prior as part of the generally accepted knowledge of society. In the past when a majority of society was familiar with certain stories from the Bible or with some, if not all, of the Ten Commandments, today there is a lack of acquaintance with most of the Judeo-Christian story.

## **Post Modernism**

Modernism came out of the Enlightenment with the manifestation of mechanism, industrialism, progress, and scientific inquiry. It elevated human reason, human progress, and human authority. The modern assumption was that we could discover absolute truth through rigorous scientific exploration.

Postmodernism marks a rejection of the emphasis on rational discovery. In post-modernity, there is an assertion that there is no objective “truth” because all perception and knowledge is deeply affected by the observer’s own social placement, his/her culture, and his/her own personal experience. Thus, there is no prevailing worldview. Rather, all worldviews are equally valid. Everything is subjective and individual, including morality and faith.

In this cultural milieu, we are called to represent the love, the grace, the justice, the hospitality, the inclusivity, and the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. Will we take seriously the call to incarnate this good news to the world around us?

“I want you to invest your lives not in keeping the old ship afloat but in designing and building and sailing the new ship for new adventures in a new time in history, as intrepid followers of Jesus Christ.”

-- Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2001), xviii



## **Appendix I-D: Exploring Your Neighborhood (An Exegetical Walk)**

*(An exercise from Simon Carey Holt, *God Next Door: Spirituality and Mission in the Neighborhood*. Brunswick: Acorn Press, 2007, 103-104.)*

The word exegesis literally means a critical interpretation and is commonly applied to the study of literature. As readers of the Bible, we exegete the text with a view to discern its truth for our lives. In this exercise you're invited to undertake an exegesis—a critical interpretation—of your neighborhood. Through careful, sensitive and critical observation, your task is to discern the truth of God's presence where you live. Quite simply, it's about reading your neighborhood as one of the primary texts of daily life—one through which God speaks.

To do this properly, you need to set aside two hours of uninterrupted time. Before you head out, think about how you define your neighborhood and how it's physically laid out. Draw yourself a map, including your own home, the basic street patterns, and any landmarks, shops, commercial or community buildings, schools or parks. Be sure to include those boundary markers or natural borders that give your neighborhood definition. For some, the neighborhood will be larger than for others. It's a very personal thing; no one else can define it for you. The only criteria are that it includes where you live and is walkable.

Once you've got a rough idea in mind of what area to include, grab a notebook and pen and head off. Be sure to include time along the way to stop, buy a drink somewhere, sit in a park or at a bus stop, linger outside public buildings or places of interest. There's no hurry.

Here's a list of questions to help you as you go:

1. As you stand just outside your house or apartment—by the front gate or on the footpath—what do you see as you look in each direction? What do you hear or sense? What activity do you notice?
2. As you walk the neighborhood, what do you notice about the architecture of the houses or apartment complexes? On average, how old do you think the houses or apartments are in this area? How much renovation or rebuilding is going on?
3. What do you notice about the front gardens or entrance ways to each of the houses or apartments? Does your neighborhood feel like a cared-for place?
4. How many houses or apartments for sale do you see? What indicators of transience do you observe? Does the neighborhood have a feeling of permanence or change?
5. Is there a freeway or major highway close by? If so, try and imagine this area before it existed. Who has gained and lost by its introduction?
6. Stop—sit if you can—in a tree-lined street or quieter spot and also at a busy intersection. What are the smells and sounds of the neighborhood? How quiet or noisy is it?
7. How many community or civic buildings do you see? What are their purposes? Do they look inviting? Well used? Deserted?
8. What public spaces are provided for children, teenagers or adults? Are they being used? If so, in what ways?
9. If there is a local park, what do you notice about it? Does it feel like an inviting place? Who is there? How is it used?

10. Do you pass any churches or religious buildings? What does their design or appearance communicate to you?
11. What kinds of commercial buildings are there? Walk around a supermarket or local store and identify who makes up the clientele.
12. If your neighborhood includes a shopping area, is there provision made for people to sit, relax, or relate?
13. Excluding the areas of business, how many people did you pass walking? What age, race, and gender are they? How pedestrian-friendly is the neighborhood?
14. Imagine yourself as an old, infirm person with no car, or as a young child living in the middle of this neighborhood. How disadvantaged or advantaged would you be with respect to shops, churches, parks or schools?
15. What evidence is there of public transport? Who uses it?
16. Are there places in your neighborhood that you wouldn't go? Why?
17. Where are the places of life, hope, beauty or community in this neighborhood?
18. What evidence of struggle, despair, neglect and alienation do you see?
19. What sense of connection do you feel to your neighborhood as you walk through it?
20. In what way(s) do you sense God's presence where you live?

# **Starting New Initiatives: A Discernment Process**



## **Module Two: Engage**



## Introduction

Congratulations! You (or your Session) have just completed Module 1 and are now ready for the next step.

Module 1 was specifically designed to begin a process that will result in a new initiative started by your church. For the past year, your Session has been praying, studying, and discerning what God is doing in your church community and the community around you. They will have much to share with you as this next phase begins.

Module 2 continues this work, but expands the circle of leadership to include others who comprise the ongoing leadership core of the church. This next phase will guide this group to a deeper exploration and engagement with the community that surrounds your church in the hopes that it will lead us to see where God is at work and how we might join God in the work God has already begun.

Module 2 consist of 8 gatherings that will take you through some of the conversations that your Session has been having to concretely selecting a new initiative to start that will meet some specific need in your local community.

This is an opportunity to reconnect with your community in a very powerful way. We've had Elders and members tell us that they "know" the people and needs of their community. The problem is that most times, they really don't. We make assumptions about people and issues that sometimes are borne out in the lives of those whom we don't know. The only way to know for sure is to talk with them, walk the neighborhoods and start being in relationship with those in your community. It's is like going on a "bear" hunt as a child, "You can't go over it. You can't go around it. You have to go *through* it." We know this may make some of you uncomfortable. It has probably been a while since you've exercised those "muscles." Trust us. You will do great and people are very willing to talk — *if you are willing to listen.*



Once you've completed your community exploration in Gathering 4, it will start to become clear what the needs of your community may be. Now the fun really begins as you consider what resources God has placed at your disposal for God's work in the community. Where the passion, resources and needs meet...miracles will happen!

It is an awesome journey to be on when you seek to serve the people that God loves and for whom God's heart breaks.

**Be strong! Be Courageous! Be passionate! And above all Be Faithful!**



# Gathering 1: Where Have We Been, Where Do We Go From Here?

**Purpose:** *To provide an opportunity for the elders to share their work from Module One to a larger group in the church. This session also begins the process of engaging your community in a strategic way.*

**Preparation:** Invite the key leaders you compiled in Module 1 who would comprise at least 20% of your weekly worship attendance.

Select Elders to come prepared to lead the following parts of the meeting: Greeter; Sharing, Part 1; Sharing, Part 2; Sharing, Part 3; and re-reading John 15:1-17 and making the subsequent statements. Have copies of the Gathered Insights from Module 1, Gathering 10 for everyone.

## Materials:

- Module One booklets
- Pens/Paper

**Welcome:** Designate one elder to greet the group and pray for this new team.

**Scripture and Short Message:** (5 minutes)

The pastor or an elder reads John 15:1-17 and, reflecting on **Gathering 1, Module 1**, delivers a short message.

## Sharing, Part 1:

- Review **Gathering 2, Module 1**

Choose one elder to share with the group, “How my life would be different if Jesus were not a part of my life, my family, my job?”

- **Discussion:**

- Ask the group, “In just a few words, how do you think most of the people in our community would answer the question, ‘How has Jesus impacted your life?’”
- Have people share quickly, take 5 to 10 answers.

**Sharing, Part Two:**

- Review **Gathering 3, Module 1**

Choose one elder to read her/his 2-3 sentences defining what it means to be church.

**Group Question:** Break into groups of 3-5 and answer these questions:

- When you think about our church, how have we related to the community?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What do you think the community thinks about us?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Does the community know we exist?

Bring the entire group back together and share your answers.

### **Sharing, Part Three:**

- Review Gathering 10, **Module 1**

Choose one elder to share the list of “Gathered Insights” from the work of the session.

### **Scripture and Short Message:**

An elder reads John 15:1-17 again and says:

1. “The purpose of this group is to seek a new way for us as a church to be fruitful in this community.”
2. “We are going to try a few things together that will hopefully help us go with Jesus into our community in at least one new way, hopefully so that we can fulfill together John 15:16.”
3. *(Re-read aloud John 15:16)*
4. “We are going to meet 7 more times, a few of those gatherings may be ½ day retreats.

### **Prayer**

Have different members of the group offer up prayers asking God to give us direction and faith so we might know what new initiatives we should undertake and have the faith to move forward.

**Homework:** Between now and the next meeting, ask someone in the church and someone outside the church:

- “What do you hear when I say the name Jesus?”

– “What do you hear when I say the word church?”

– “What do you hear when I say the word Christian?”



## Gathering 2: Who is Jesus to Me [Us]?

**Purpose:** *To explore how our understanding of Jesus, Church, salvation, evangelism, and service and how our understanding impacts our day to day lives.*

**Preparation:** Elders or staff should have contacted everyone who participated in **Gathering 1, Module 2** to encourage them to continue to be a part of this discernment process.

### Materials Needed:

- Pens (enough for everyone)
- Paper (a ream of copy paper will be sufficient)

### Community Building:

Turn to the person next to you and share a couple of the responses you heard from last week's homework.

### The Gathering:

- **Prayer:** Invite two or three people to pray for your time together tonight and thank God for the people who helped us to be in a relationship with Jesus.
- **Message:** The pastor or other elder reads Matthew 16:13-17 and delivers a short message (5 minutes) on the impact and importance of Jesus' question, "But who do you say that I am?" in Matthew 16:15.
- **Small Group Exercise:** Break into groups of 3-4. Share your answers to the following questions:
  1. Who was/are the person(s) instrumental in your being a Christian?

2. Five ways my life would be different if Jesus were not a part of my life, my family, my job.

3. Three ways our understanding of Jesus impacts our church in the area of:

– Service

– Salvation

– Evangelism

- **Larger Group Exercise:** Have three or four of the small groups join together (thus creating two or more “larger groups.”) Ask one person from each group to share her/his list of “Five ways my life would be different if Jesus were not a part of my life, my family, my job.” After hearing each list, make a new list of the items groups had in common.

Repeat this process for “Three ways our understanding of Jesus impacts our church in the area of: Service, Salvation, and Evangelism.”

- **Whole Group:** If bringing three or four of your groups of 3-4 together created more than one large group, have someone from each of those larger groups share their lists of answers they had in common.
  - How should these common answers shape our life and ministry as a church?



- What would be the impact for us as a church if there was a shared vision of “who is Jesus?” and “What is church, salvation, and service?”
  
- Do you think our church has a shared vision of these foundational understandings?
  
  
- **Short Message:** The pastor or elder reads again Matthew 16:13-17 and shares what is going to happen in Gathering 3 and how our answers in this session’s small groups help to define what is church for us.

**Prayer:** Invite two or three volunteers to pray for God to continue to lead this team.



## Gathering 3: Getting Ready to Go Out

**Purpose:** *Prepare the members of your group to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit as they go out and engage the community in their own turf. Identify possible events to observe and/or locations for site visits.*

**Scripture and Reflection:** (20 minutes)

Read Acts 17:16-23

1. What captured your attention in this passage?
2. What was Paul doing in Athens while he waited?
3. What was Paul's attitude towards people's idolatry?
4. How was this a ministry opportunity for Paul?

5. What area(s) of your community are you distressed about? *Write them down.*
  
6. How may God be calling you to ministry in the areas you lifted up?

**Prayer Time:** (15 minutes)

*Pray for the different areas in your community that were lifted up.*

*Pray for the people in those areas*

*Ask the Holy Spirit to open your hearts and minds. Listen to where the Spirit may be leading for possible opportunities and places to engage the community.*

*Ask God to continue to “distress” you about where God is asking you to be.*

*Ask God to open doors and possibilities of engagement in your community.*

**Define Your Area:** (15 minutes)

What would you consider your ministry area (i.e., how far from your church can you effectively engage and serve the community)?

Who is in our ministry area (ages, ethnicities, families, etc.)?

What are the *perceived* needs in/of the community?

What do we have to offer (a quick review of who is Jesus for us)?

### **Looking at the Possibilities:** (20 minutes)

While waiting, Paul decides to walk around Athens and observe what is happening, who is there, what is there, and what possibilities there may be in sharing the gospel. As you spend time thinking about the possibilities of ministry, be open to look at places where the ministry opportunity may not be as obvious. Be willing to engage people where they are at, observe what is happening in the community, and see what God may reveal or what doors will open up for you to be a part of this community.

- Hear back from the elders that you selected in **Gathering Two** about their neighborhood exegesis and their experience (**refer to Gathering Six, Module One**).
- Make a list of all the large community events that may be coming up for your community (when, where, who will be there, etc.).

- Make a list of other possible sites or events where you may observe and engage the community (sports events, community days, concerts at the park, etc.).
  
- Add all of the areas that God placed in your heart in your time of prayer.
  
- Add any other possible sites or events.

**Preparing to Engage:** (10 minutes)

Before being asked to go to the Areopagus, Paul walked around and spoke with Jews and the devout--people who he knew. He also talked with anyone who would listen. Most importantly, Paul *observed*. As you prepare yourself to go to the community, be mindful that you are an active learner, that the places that you are visiting are welcoming you, that this particular place may have its own way of doing things.

## Observe, Engage, Be!

*Be in prayer.* Pray that God will speak to you and lead you as you prepare to engage the community.

*Be in partnership.* Find out if there are people in the community that may be looking for partnerships that may talk with you.

*Be ready* to engage people in conversation.

*Be informed* about where you will be visiting.

*Be willing* to drop any preconceived ideas about who is there, what is needed, and what solutions you may bring.

*Be an active listener and learner!*

**Prayer:** (10 minutes)

Break into groups of three. Pray for discernment. Ask God to open your heart and give eyes to see the community as God sees it. Pray for the people and places you lifted up. Pray that you will be willing to go where God will lead.

### **Homework:**

- Pray for God's leading as you continue to discern where you should go.
- Continue to identify community events (if possible) or scout out a local sports leagues that are playing in your area (football, little league, soccer games, etc) and neighborhoods around your church. Where are the gathering places (or third places) where people gather to talk or hang out? Name 3-5 and send to the moderator of Module Two.

- Identify 3-5 places in the list that you compiled that move your heart and bring it to the next gathering.

*Pray without ceasing.*



## Gathering 4: Community Contexts - Site Visits

*\*This gathering will be longer than most and require some advanced planning and transportation.*

**Preparation:** *This gathering will sharpen your observation skills and help you begin to discern the context in which, where, why, and how your church might begin a new initiative. You will visit one potential place or people where God might do something new.*

**NOTE: In Gathering Three, you should have identified 3-10 potential sites and/or people groups. You cannot process without having identified them. If you do not have them, postpone Gathering Four until you do.**

This visit will provide a model for future site visits. Meet in the sanctuary prior to being sent out on the “site visit”

**Bible Study:** (20 minutes for guided meditation and prayer)

In preparation for visiting and observing potential sites, join together for this guided meditation:

**Leader:** Close your eyes. Sit in a comfortable position. Become conscious of your breathing. Take in God’s words, in a rhythm that flows with your breathing.

**Leader:** Breathe in. (hold breath) Breathe out. (pause)

**Leader:** Breathe in. (hold breath) Breathe out. (pause)

**Leader** (Read Isaiah 43:19.) Listen to the Word of God. “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” (pause)

**Leader:** Repeat Isaiah 43:19 two more times

**Leader** (Pause after each sentence.): You are in search of the place where God will do a new thing. Imagine



a place of wilderness. Is it light or dark? Is it quiet or loud? Is it solitary or crowded? Who is there? Who needs a spring of living water? And how is the water flowing to that person or to that group of people? Hear the water flowing. How does it sound? Feel the water flowing into the wilderness. It refreshes. It satisfies. It turns the wilderness into something fresh...and alive... and safe...and full of life. Now, continue breathing slowly. Open your eyes when you are ready.

Briefly share what you envisioned in terms of both wilderness and the waters of life.

**Prayer:** As a group, pray for the people you will meet and the places you will go.

**Content:** (2 hours)

Prior to the gathering the moderator should have narrowed down the possible places or events to visit to match with the number of people participating in Module 2. This is best done in groups of 2-5 (easy enough to fit in a car). The site visit will be a mixture of observation and conversation.

It may be risky to talk to someone who you don't know. Relax. Let things happen naturally and don't force it. If a person seems to be bothered by the conversation, don't push it.

**Conversation:** (Refer to Appendix A)

There are many ways to strike up a conversation but be sure to respect the other person's space and time. The following is not a comprehensive list of ways to engage conversation but can help you get started. Be creative.

*What is the biggest problem facing our community?*

*Do you know of \_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church?*

*How long have you lived in the community?*

## Observation:

- Gather at a location at the site (coffee house, restaurant, park, etc.).
- Divide up. Stand/sit apart from each other to make observations. Sit on benches/stand on corners/place yourselves in separate spaces to observe from different directions and points of view.
- Take a moment to breathe in deeply and ask God to reveal insights to you. Absorb the atmosphere and surroundings. Notice activities, faces, sounds, smells.
- Complete the Site Visit report in a reflective manner (this is not a race). Notice as Jesus might notice. Ask for your eyes to become like Jesus' eyes. Offer your comments and try to avoid stereotypes. Really look for clues.
  - Who is there?
  - What are they doing?
  - What are they talking about?
  - What are their ages, genders, races?
  - What language are they speaking?
  - How are they dressed? Notice details: jewelry, shoes, hairstyles, tech toys, etc.

- Can you imagine what they might do for work?
  
- Do they live in the area? Work in the area? Do they seem in transient?
  
- Do they come and go as if they are on a tight schedule? Is their manner leisurely?
  
- What sounds do you hear in the distance?
  
- What levels of car/bus/foot traffic do you observe?
  
- Are there sidewalks? Street lights? Signage?
  
- What do the people you're observing already have?
  
- What do they need?
  
- What else do you notice?
  
- What is your visceral response to this site?

## Reflection (90 minutes)

Gather back at the church to follow up on the visits. As a group respond to the following questions:

- How were you feeling during the site visits? Share both your positive and negative feelings. What is God telling you about risk and sacrifice? Do these reflections tell you something about what God is directing you to do?
  
- Share your reflections together. How were your observations similar? How were they different? What very specific details did you notice? How did you see the people and the space through God's eyes?
  
- Based on the visits you made, what are the possible ministries that \_\_\_\_\_Presbyterian Church could do? Brainstorm (without discussion) about the possibilities and capture on newsprint.

Pray silently for the people you see, for the neighborhood, for the businesses, the people who live in the homes, etc. Ask God to reveal if this might be where we are called to “do a new thing” in Jesus’ name.

**Homework:**

Continue to reflect on the visits you made. The moderator will capture the opportunities that you brainstormed during this gathering and begin to pray over the possibilities. Dream about the things your church could do. Where do your passion and the opportunities God may be placing before your church intersect? Be ready to share and refine your list to end up with the top 2-5 ministry possibilities by the end of Gathering Six.



## Gathering 5: What are the Possibilities?

**Purpose:** *To enter into a period of discernment of the possibilities for community outreach and service align with where you believe the Holy Spirit is asking you to go.*

**Preparation:** Reflect on and pray though the following scripture:

*We were eyewitnesses of his majesty; for when he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the majestic glory saying, "This is my Son whom I love, with him I am well pleased," we ourselves heard his voice when we were with him on the sacred mountain. (2 Peter 1:16-18)*

Talk briefly about a person in your life who has shared with you the love of God.

### Scripture and Reflection:

Read Acts 16:6-10

- Where did Paul want to go to reach people for Christ?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Did his plans work out?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How was his desire to serve fulfilled?

## **Group Reflection on the Site Visits:**

How were you feeling during the site visits? Share both your positive and negative feelings. What is God telling you about risk and sacrifice? Do these reflections tell you something about what God is directing you to do?

How has God been working in your team?

Based on these reflections, which areas of ministry would you give the highest priority? In other words, how is your passion for particular ministries aligning with where God wants you to join God in mission? Pay attention to data, feelings, ideas, thoughts, how you were moved, and why.

What needs in the community give you a sense of fulfillment and excitement when you think about joining God in that mission?

**Prayer Time:** Break into groups of three. Pray for discernment. Ask God to give you the “Call to Macedonia.” Pray for the people and places you experienced on your site visits. Pray that your hearts would break over the things that break God’s heart.

**Group Work:** Write down your top two to five outreach priorities. Share which priorities carry the highest sense of urgency. Between now and the next meeting, set aside time each day to go to God about where God is leading you in mission. If you have the opportunity, pray with other people from the team.

**Homework:** (Refer to the end of Gathering Four) Before the end of the meeting, divide into pairs. Each pair should visit two of the areas of outreach that were selected in Gathering Four before the next meeting. Once again, pay attention to the people in the communities and pray about how God might be leading you to serve the people you meet and see.





## **Gathering 6: Who Has God Placed on Our Hearts? The Vision Plan**

**Purpose:** *To make an initial decision on which initiative(s) or ministry(ies) to recommend to the Session and the identification of a team to lead the congregation to start this new endeavor.*

**Prayer Time:** (20 minutes)

Spend time today praying as a group for the two to five potential ministry priorities determined in Gathering 5. Pray as specifically as possible. Pray for the people who you saw on your site visits. Pray for the ministries that are already there. Pray for those who gather at the coffee shops, bars, strip clubs, schools, markets, and corners of the three to five ministry possibilities.

**Bible Study and Reflection:** (20 minutes)

Read 2 Corinthians 6: 16-20

Reflections:

- What does it mean to be reconciled?
- Can you recall an experience of being reconciled to God? To another person?
- What might it look like for those in your potential ministry area(s) to be reconciled to God? To each other?

- Can you give an example of when you have been aware that you are Christ's ambassador?
  
- Whom are you seeing in your potential new ministry areas, no longer from a human point of view, but through the eyes of Christ?

**Content:** (1 hour)

**Determining the Top Priority:**

At this point, the Leadership Core needs to think about the capacity of the church to start a new initiative.

Consider the priorities you selected:

- What are the specific concerns of the community that might be met by these ministries? List for each.
  
- Are there needs, concerns, and/or challenges unmet by the current ministries? Make a list.

- Is there any group already doing ministry in the communities we've identified? List for each.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Are there areas where we have passion and need to find the resources to do the ministry?

**Our new ministry priorities are:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

- Is there agreement in the groups about pursuing these specific priorities? At this point, are you planning to choose one or more than one area to pursue?

**Preparing for Module 3:**

- Name the gifts we bring as individuals, a church, or a community to our designated new initiative.

- Brainstorm existing gifts and resources in our vision areas. On newsprint, brainstorm the following in reference to the new initiative(s): “people,” “places,” “money” and whatever else you consider a resource/gift. Brainstorm each category with this question:

*“What people gifts/resources do we have for this particular vision area?”*

- Who might we want to lead the team and the congregation in this new ministry initiative? List all people (members or not) who might be interested or passionate about this new ministry. Include those who may be in the room for this gathering.

### **Prayer: (In Unison)**

Looking to the Future...

*Faithful God, with hope we look to the future. You accept us the way that we are and call us to grow. You give us time and opportunity and grace. We place the time between now and our next gathering in your hands. We ask you to help us be more sensitive to the Spirit's presence and guidance. We ask your special help in discerning the mission we should undertake. God, with the Spirit within our hearts, we go forward with joy and trust. Amen.*



## Gathering 7: Are We the Ones?

**Purpose:** *To ask ourselves if we are the ones to do what we have decided to do in Gathering Six and to determine who should take the lead for us in this endeavor.*

**Prayer Time:** (20 minutes)

**Bible Study and Reflection:** (20 minutes) Spend time today praying as a group for the two to five people and groups determined in Gathering 5. Pray as specifically as possible. Pray for the people who you saw on your site visits. Pray for the new initiatives you determined in Gathering 6. Pray for those who gather at the coffee shops, bars, strip clubs, schools, markets, and corners of the three to five ministry possibilities.

Read 1 Corinthians 12: 1-31

Reflections:

- Everyone has gifts. What spiritual gift(s) do you believe God has equipped you with? (Help each other out in naming them. Keep track of the gifts in the room.)
  
- Why are the gifts distributed so widely?

- What is the purpose of God distributing gifts?
  
- How do we keep from becoming “uni-dimensional” as a church?

**Content:** (1 hour)

### **Time to Confirm**

At this point, the Leadership Core needs to confirm the new initiative(s). This is a time to look back on what you discerned God wanted you to do in Gathering 6. What you will do largely depends on the resources of the church and the commitment needed to do what you believe God wants you to do at this time. Let’s be clear, if you do one thing or start one new initiative out of the process, you should consider it wildly successful. If you can do more that would be very exciting. Remember not to do more than you can realistically handle. It’s better to do one thing well than many things poorly.

Consider the priorities you selected:

- Is there any group already doing ministry with those you identified in the community as priorities to reach with a new initiative? List for each.

Once you have a grasp of who is already doing (or not doing) work in the areas you have selected, you need to ask the hard question, “Are we the ones to initiate this new ministry?” In order to discern the answer, you need to compare what your gifts and resources are as a church to what’s already happening in the selected area.

- Have everyone share the results of their homework from **Gathering 6** (lists of resources and gifts). Make it so everyone’s responses are visible throughout this next section.

Ask the question(s):

- Using the results of your homework, what new initiatives are we uniquely gifted / resourced to do? Are there areas in which we lack resources or where others are better suited / situated?
  
- Looking at your list of possible new initiatives, are there any that if you do not do them no one will?
  
- Are there others who are better gifted than you are to fulfill this new initiative? If so, would partnering with them be a possibility?

Order your priorities according to the distribution of gifts, other ministries, passions and resources.

Our new initiative priorities are:

1.

2.

3.

*\*\* This is the point where you will need to communicate with the Session for their approval of this (these) new initiative(s). \*\**

**Homework:** Take your new initiative priorities and pray over the list daily.

**Preparation for Gathering Eight:** In order to move this process forward, it is suggested that Gathering 8 of Module 2 be a half day retreat (8am-12 or 1pm). Schedule a time and place where most of your team can gather. Bring your list of core values and your vision plan with you so each person has it at the next meeting.





## Gathering 8: The Mission Plan

**Purpose:** *To develop a one to two page document that lists the core values, the vision plan, and sets out an action plan for the new initiative(s) you've identified.*

**Preparation:** Make sure everyone has before them the proposed "new initiative(s)." You will also need to find a copy of "Bull Horn Evangelism," a short video produced by Rob Bell. You can find the video on [www.nooma.com](http://www.nooma.com), or on YouTube ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)).

**Materials:**

- DVD Player/TV or other A/V setup
- Newsprint

**Prayer Time:** (20 minutes)

Bring the list of new initiative(s) to the group. Take time to ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in your deliberations. Ask for assistance in knowing what steps to take to move forward. Ask that God would reveal to you, even now, corrective measures in your plan. Take time to be quiet. Allow yourselves to listen as well as talk. Have the leader of this gathering close this time of prayer when it seems appropriate.

**Bible Study and Reflection #1:** (30 minutes)

**Read Acts 17:16-34** once out loud and then give everyone a chance to read it quietly on their own. Have the group circle key words and phrases that "jump out" to them in either the quiet reading or when it was read out loud.

*<sup>16</sup> While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols. <sup>17</sup> So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and also in the marketplace every day with those who happened*

to be there. <sup>18</sup>Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities." (This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) <sup>19</sup>So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? <sup>20</sup>It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means." <sup>21</sup>Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new. <sup>22</sup>Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. <sup>23</sup>For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. <sup>24</sup>The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, <sup>25</sup>nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. <sup>26</sup>From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, <sup>27</sup>so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him — though indeed he is not far from each one of us. <sup>28</sup>For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.' <sup>29</sup>Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. <sup>30</sup>While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup>because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." <sup>32</sup>When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, "We will hear you again about this." <sup>33</sup>At that point Paul left them. <sup>34</sup>But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

(NRSV)

- How would you describe Paul's mission plan to the Athenians? What were some of the key values and concepts that you should consider in your mission plan?
- How did Paul develop his vision for who lived in Athens? How did his approach change according to who he was trying to reach?
- How well did he know the people? How was that evident in this passage?

**Play the DVD:** "Bull Horn Evangelism," from [www.Nooma.com](http://www.Nooma.com) or view it on [YouTube.com](http://YouTube.com).

- Describe a time when you experienced a Mission Plan like the bull horn man's.

- How did Paul's Mission Plan use context and culture?
- How was Paul's Mission Plan successful? How was his mission plan unsuccessful?

**Content:** (1 hour)

- **Brainstorm:** How can we reach the "who" of the Vision Plan?

This is the beginning of the Mission Plan. Write on a whiteboard or newsprint your brainstorm ideas around the question: "What are some possible plans for initiating our new ministry(ies) with those identified in the Vision Statement?"

Consider:

- How could those in the vision statement be introduced to Jesus?
- What could be an outreach strategy for this initiative? Brainstorm a host of possibilities (i.e. a car rally, neighborhood clean-up, after-school tutoring, thrift-store, café conversations, etc.).
- What needs to happen to "keep it real"?
- How would we embody our core values and actions?
- What key leaders would be needed to begin this new initiative?

*\*\*Make sure you capture this brainstorming session on newsprint or dry-erase board so you can recall the suggestions as a group!*

## Break

### Bible Study and Reflection #2: (30 minutes)

Read: Acts 6:1-7

*<sup>1</sup>Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. <sup>2</sup>And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait at tables. <sup>3</sup>Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, <sup>4</sup>while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.' <sup>5</sup>What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. <sup>6</sup>They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. <sup>7</sup>The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. (NRSV)*

Pentecost has happened. The church is growing. Miracles, dangers, all kinds of exciting and scary things are happening fast.

And now, they've reached a situation where some organization is needed.

Examine what's going on in Acts 6:1-7:

- Look at where the church is at this point.
- Who is staffing it?

- What are the needs? Where are the holes?
  
- How will new servants be chosen? What kinds of people are these new servants?
  
- What will they be doing?
  
- How did their actions match their faith in Jesus?
  
- What were the results?
  
- What was their Mission Plan?

**Content:** (90 minutes)

**How do you combine the “who” and the “why” with the “what”?**

*Share again the Core Values Statement.*

*Share again the Vision Statement (Who and Why).*

**Take your brainstorming results from earlier in the day.  
Answer the following questions:**

- What patterns do you see?
- Can any suggestions be combined?
- Can duplications be removed?

**Spend time discussing what you see:**

- Is there a pattern?
- Are there common ideas?
- Can you agree on a unified plan that comes from the ideas?

## **Name the particulars in your plan:**

- What are the specific ideas for taking Jesus out to the community?
- What kinds of leaders are needed?
- Who else is needed on the team to start this new initiative?
- What ministry gifts will be required of the leaders?
- What ministry gifts will be required of the rest of the team?
- What are the responsibilities of the leaders? The team?
- What tangibles will be required in terms of communication tools, space, hospitality resources?



- What financial resources will it take?
  
- Does this communicate your Foundational Statements or “absolutes”?
  
- What are the absolutes about this plan? What are the possibilities? Separate the absolutes and the possibilities. Take a step back and review which is which. Example: Is ‘X’ an absolute or a possibility?

*\*\*At this time, if you have more than one initiative, prioritize which initiative should be first, second, etc..*

- Agree upon and write a one-page **Mission Plan** based on this exercise.

**At this point you should have a:**

1. Foundational Statement
2. Vision Statement of “who and why”
3. Mission Plan

**Prayer:**

Have the facilitator of the meeting ask individuals or sub-groups of the gathering to pray for each initiative. Ask God to reveal more clearly: which is most important; more precise plans; and who is being called to enact the new initiatives.



## Appendix II-A: Site Visit Guide

### Site Visit Observations:

- Who is there?
- What are they doing?
- What are they talking about?
- What are their ages, genders, races?
- What languages are they speaking?
- How are they dressed? Notice details: jewelry, shoes, hairstyles, name badges, tech toys, etc.
- Can you imagine what they might do for work?
- Do they live in the area? Work in the area?
- Do they seem transient?
- Do they come and go as if they are on a tight schedule?
- Is their manner leisurely?
- What sounds do you hear in the area?
- What levels of car/bus/foot traffic do you observe?
- Are there sidewalks? Streetlights? Signage?
- What do the people you're observing already have?
- What do they need?
- What is your visceral response to this place?

### **Three Actions:**

- Talk with at least one person in the potential ministry area.
- Have a drink or something to eat in a local establishment.
- Bring back a token/symbol that helps you tell the story of the area.

### **Site Visit Discussion Starters:**

- “Excuse me, do you work or live in the area?”
- “If I were to move here, what would I need to know?”
- “What do people do for work here?”
- “Who lives here?” (age groups, race, class, families, singles, etc.)
- “What do people in the area do for recreation?”
- “Do you like living/working here?”
- “Do people live/work here for a long time?”
- “What are the problems in the area?”
- “What could make this community better?”
- “What churches are in the area?”
- “Do you think this area could use another church?”



# **Starting New Initiatives:** A Discernment Process



## Module Three: Send



## Introduction

Modules One and Two consisted of a series of Gatherings to discern a specific initiative for your church to begin. Module Three is not a process of discernment; instead, you will focus on the implementation of that specific initiative. Therefore, this module is not characterized by a series of “gatherings” but rather, is a (non-exhaustive) checklist that will guide you through launching your new initiative.

One elder told us, “Oh a discernment tool. Our church loves to discern. We don’t like doing anything in our community, but we love to discern about it.” Don’t let the checklist slow you down. It is crucial at this point to keep moving towards implementation. If this tool ends only with a series of gatherings to discern a new initiative and does not lead to something new happening in your community, then we have failed. We Presbyterians have done many studies, but our communities need us to move beyond intellectual study and do something.

Doing something is risky; odds are good you might fail. There are no guarantees of success. Consider the story of the early church in the book of Acts; there are as many “failures” as successes. History has proven that many apparent failures have led to great successes. We believe the only failure for you would be if you never tried something new.

Each item on the checklist is followed by a brief suggestion. Some initiatives require an hour to complete the checklist while others might take a year of hard work to complete it. Don’t let a simple initiative (like handing out water one Saturday to people at a local park) bog down hours of committee work. At the same time, don’t rush a more complicated initiative. Creating an afterschool program for at risk students will take many teams and meetings to change lives. Don’t let a checklist make this new initiative become a task. Value the relationships that will be formed by working with others on something new.

Most importantly—surround this initiative with prayer. Prayer is not an accessory activity; it needs to be a core activity. *This new initiative is an act of the Holy Spirit!*

# **Moving from Discernment to Implementation: The Checklist for the Leadership Team**

Pray & recruit others to pray about the new initiative.

Assign a date when the new initiative will take place or begin (with session).

Determine how long to try the new initiative (with session).

Develop a list of the “pieces” that need to be in place before this initiative can start.

Assign a date for when each “piece” needs to be completed.

Determine if each “piece” is done by an individual or team.

Assign a date when work on each “piece” needs to begin.

Continue to pray.

Develop a list of the financial and people resources needed to begin the new initiative.

Determine where the resources for this new initiative will come from or who is responsible for raising resources.

Develop a list of what needs to be communicated to the congregation (with session).

Assign a date when each aspect of the new initiative needs to be communicated.

Assign & recruit the right people to communicate each aspect of the new initiative.

Assign & recruit people or teams to fulfill each “piece” needed for this new initiative.

Determine if/when all of the people working on the pieces need to be together before the new initiative begins.

One month or one week before the new initiative begins, review that all of the pieces are all in place.

Gather for prayer & praise, begin the new initiative (all involved).

Review the impact and effectiveness of the new initiative.

# Moving from Discernment to Implementation: The Checklist Expanded

## **Pray and recruit others to pray about the new initiative:**

This new initiative, if it is going to be of any earthly good, needs to be a movement of the Holy Spirit. Our tendency is to get to work. The church of the Book of Acts was told by Jesus to get to prayer first.

**Assign a date when the new initiative will take place or begin:** The challenge here is to find a date that will allow you to prepare well but that is not so far in the future that people lose energy for the new initiative before it ever gets started.

**Determine how long you will try the new initiative:** A onetime initiative is easy, “We will do it and after we have done it we will decide if we ever try it again.” Other initiatives will take a month, 4 months, or a year to really gain traction. Build into the implementation a long enough time to truly try the new initiative but a short enough time to end it if it is not fulfilling its goals.

**Develop a list of the “pieces” that need to be in place before this initiative can start:** Dreamers are not the best for this activity. Find people who have the ability to see the steps to get to where the dreamers are pointing.

**Assign a date for when each “piece” needs to be completed:** Many new initiatives never get off the ground because leadership teams do not have anyone who holds the rest of the team accountable to fulfilling each piece in a timely fashion. What needs to be done the month before the initiative begins? What needs to be done the week of the initiative? What needs to happen the day of the initiative?

**Assign a date when work on each “piece” needs to begin:** Many new initiatives never get off the ground because leadership teams do not have anyone who holds the rest of the team accountable to fulfilling each piece in a timely fashion.



**Determine if each “piece” is done by an individual or a team:** Think of the complexity of the task. It is frustrating to have to few or too many people involved.

**Continue to pray:** Pray without ceasing. Maybe this entire initiative is really God’s way of teaching your church to come together in prayer.

**Develop a list of the financial and people resources needed to begin the new initiative:** Do you have the people and skills needed to move forward with the initiative? What expenses, facilities, supplies, and equipment will you need? What community resources, approvals, permits, community leaders participation, do you need?

**Determine where the resources for this new initiative will come from or who is responsible for raising the needed resources:** Challenge the congregation with what is needed. The more people are challenged to invest in this new initiative the greater chance that it will be impactful. Your church will never be amazed with people’s response if you do not ask.

**Develop a list of what needs to be communicated to the congregation:** Does the entire congregation know what you are doing and why you are doing this new initiative? Do the people in the community and not in your church need to know anything about this initiative before it begins?

**Assign a date when each aspect of the new initiative needs to be communicated:** The dates keep the communication flowing. Avoid trying to get everyone on board at the last minute. The more complicated the initiative the more communication will be needed.

**Assign and recruit the right people to communicate each aspect of the new initiative:** There can be one person who is the lead communicator but if you get a variety of people communicating you will find a variety of people will support this new initiative.

**Assign and recruit people or teams to fulfill each “piece” needed for this new initiative:** This might be the most important element for the success of the initiative. This is an opportunity to involve people who have been on the fringe of your church. Don’t recruit all long time members nor recruit all new or fringe members. Mix it up and the body of Christ will become evident.

**Determine if and when all of the people and teams working on the pieces need to be together before the new initiative begins:** Gathering everyone together is not the time for work but for worship, prayer, and vision. There is energy when everyone involved can be reminded together what the church hopes to accomplish through this new initiative.

**Continue to Pray:** As the time for beginning the initiative gets closer, pray for the initiative in worship, in session, during Sunday school, and whenever the church gathers.

**One month or one week before the new initiative begins, review that all of the pieces are in place:** There will be surprises, so, plan well so you can handle the one or two unplanned obstacles.

**Gather for prayer and praise, begin the new initiative:** Enjoy the day. Whatever the initiative do not get caught up in the numbers but in the people.

**Review the impact and effectiveness of the new initiative:** Use this review to guide you in the future. Don’t skip this step.



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