



Neighborhood Analysis

1. Lead Dwelling in the Word on Luke 10: 1-11 (attached)
2. Introduce the idea of a neighborhood visit. Emphasize that the goal is to get to know more about the neighborhood and its people. We do this by using all 5 senses. We are not going out to teach anything, to convert anyone, or to change the neighborhood, just to learn from the people who know more about it that we do.
3. Ask participants if they have any ideas how they can learn about the neighborhood. They will probably mention looking at the houses and businesses, observing what kind of services are available, listening to what languages are spoken, talking to people, etc. Press them to come up with as many ideas as possible by asking, “what else?”
4. Explain parameters:
 - They will be going out 2 by 2 just as Jesus sent the disciples (3 is OK if you have an uneven number)
 - What time they need to return
 - Pray with your partner before leaving the building – that you will find the right people to talk to, that you would be observant and respectful.
5. Give three assignments:
 - Buy something to eat or drink (I often send them out over lunch and ask them to buy their lunch in the community)
 - Talk to at least one person
 - Bring back a token
6. Give the list of things to look for (attached)

Dwelling in the Word

Luke 10: 1-11

After this the Lord appointed seventy^[a] others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ²He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ ⁶And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. ⁸Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’^[b] ¹⁰But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’

Reflect:

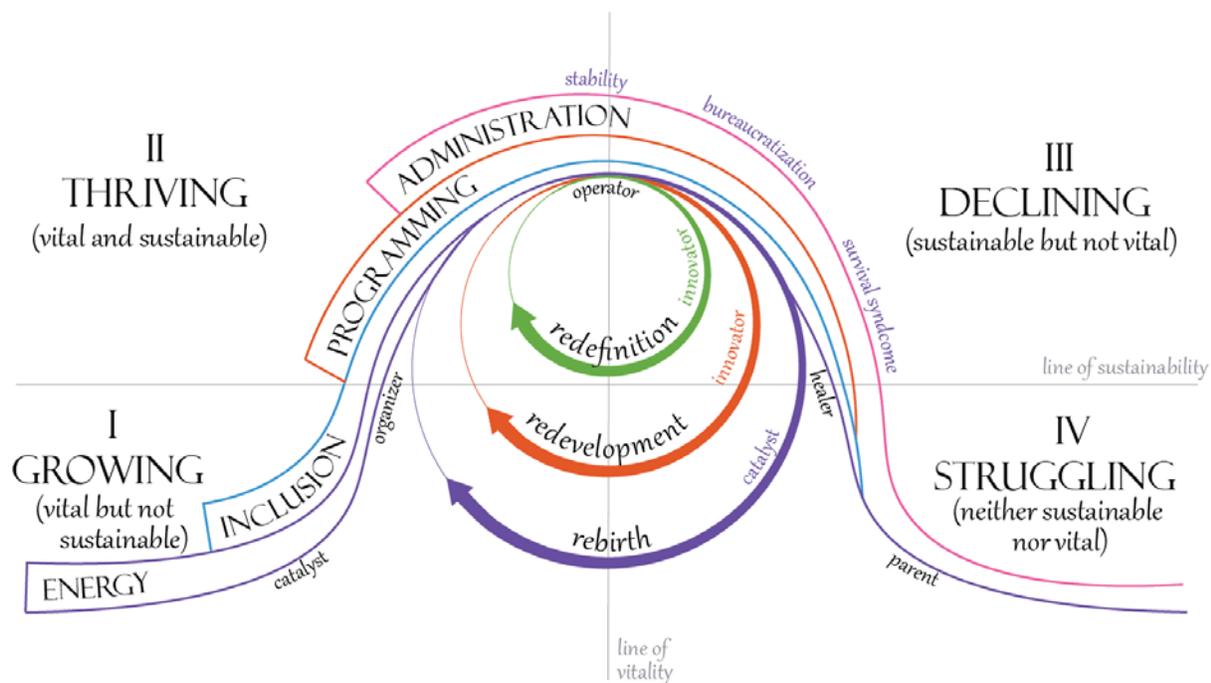
- Listen to the passage.
- Underline any words or phrases that stand out.
- Sit quietly with those words.
- What message do you hear?
- Share with another person.

Debrief

- Who do you see? Describe the people.
- What are they doing?
- What conversations do you observe?
- Are people alone or in groups?
- Do you see people walking on the streets? Driving? Sitting? Biking?
- How are the people dressed? Pay attention to details such as shoes, jewelry, hair and clothing styles.
- What do you hear and smell?
- Pay attention to the town infrastructure: sidewalks, streetlights, stop lights, signage. What do they tell you about the community?
- Describe the houses you see: single family, apartments, condos? Are they well cared for? Do you see toys in the yards? Cars parked out front? What can you tell about the community?
- What kind of signage do you see? Advertising? Fliers on telephone poles?
- What is your overall impression of the community?
- Is there anything that you might expect to see in a community that seems to be missing?
- Describe the commercial district: what stores do you see? What stores are not present? What signs of commercial vibrancy do you see?
- What businesses do you observe? Can you get a sense of what people in this community do for a living?
- Where are the children? Is there a school in the community? What signs of children or youth activities do you notice?
- What leisure activities can you observe? Is there a gym, movie theater, sports facility, etc.
- What churches or other community gathering places do you observe?

The Life Cycle of a Worshiping Community

THE CONGREGATIONAL LIFE CYCLE



The concept of a congregational life cycle has been around for a long time, and is typically illustrated with a diagram such as the one here, which is inspired by models developed and used by the ELCA, American Baptist Churches, the Episcopal Church, the Rothage Life Cycle, the US Congregational Life Survey, George Bullard, and others. The bell-shaped curve shows the stages that a congregation can proceed through, from left to right. Note that as we move from left to right, we see that the congregation is growing and then eventually plateauing (the top of the curve), but only for a short while, and then steadily declining.

But, a gradual progression toward decline and even closure is **not inevitable**. Worshiping communities can, and often do, break out of this cycle. Note where the model shows a “circling back” toward the thriving stage. This is the result of intentional work on the part of the worshiping community. Note that the further a worshiping community moves over the top of the curve and to the right, the more effort is required to move back to the thriving stage. The easiest, when caught early enough, is to redefine the worshiping community’s vision. But if the community has gone too far for mere redefinition to work, then they must redevelop. And finally, if it has declined too far to be redeveloped, it must birth a new community.



Using new surveys measuring components of vitality and sustainability, we will be able to place each participating worshipping community at a particular location on this diagram, which will provide a basic assessment of where the community is currently located in this life cycle.

FOUR QUADRANTS

Note that the diagram has two axes: vertical (representing the line of vitality) and horizontal (representing the line of sustainability). A worshipping community that is located above the line of sustainability exhibits traits that suggest it will be able to sustain itself for a long period of time. Below that line, it either hasn't yet achieved sustainability (too new) or had in the past but has lost it. To the left of the line of vitality we have communities that are vital; to the right, becoming less vital.

Putting these two axes together suggests four different quadrants (beginning at the lower left and moving along the curved line to the right, or clockwise):

Quadrant 1 – Growing

Worshipping communities in quadrant 1 are in the development stage and are new, excited, and vital. They exhibit lots of energy and vision, hope and enthusiasm, and a belief that the community has great potential. They are very change-oriented. However, they're not developed enough at this stage to be considered sustainable. Perhaps there is not enough participation for financial viability, or perhaps they're just not organized yet and fully engaged in planning and strategizing. It's a good place to be, but not for very long. Without more organization and stable leadership, a worshipping community is very vulnerable at this stage. The type of leaders best suited to lead a worshipping community at this stage are catalysts (those with charismatic qualities and entrepreneurial skills; the visionaries) and organizers (those who can grab the vision and run with it; people who know how to get things done). Usually the most growth occurs while a community is in this stage. As they become more organized, newer worshipping communities in quadrant 1 tend to think a lot about inclusion: both inviting those outside of the worshipping community, and intentionally including those who have started participating. They need to be thinking about how to draw people in and then how to assimilate them into the group, how to engage members in discovering and using their spiritual gifts, and how to distribute and use power and authority.

Quadrant 2 – Thriving

Worshipping communities in quadrant 2 have achieved sustainability while remaining vital. Although energy levels may not be as high as they were previously, energy is still there, and it may be renewed or increased by some of the worshipping community's activity. By now, it



has developed a culture of mission and also some services that meet the needs of its participants, the surrounding community, and beyond. Saarinen refers to this as programming, which serves specific functions such as worship, music, learning, serving, managing, and witnessing. In this context, administration refers to mission statements, goals, objectives, budgets, and planning. Worshiping communities in quadrant 2 tend to be higher in programming and administration, and lower on energy and inclusion than quadrant 1 communities, but all four of these “gene structures” are present. A lot of change can lead to conflict; but if well managed, small inevitable conflicts are not detrimental to the overall health of the worshiping community. At this stage, the community has developed plans for reaching people, assimilating new people, and providing intentional spiritual formation. The goal is to get to this quadrant, and when the worshiping community inevitably drifts into quadrant 3 (Declining), through some redefinition of its goals, it can return to quadrant 2 without a great deal of effort. The type of leaders we typically see at this stage might still be the catalysts and/or organizers who got the worshiping community started, but they may have lost some of their enthusiasm and moved from organizers to operators. If they forget about the passion that they once had, they can lead the community into quadrant 3.

Or, they may have left and been replaced with an operator type. Or a new visionary catalyst or organizer has moved in and is trying to convince the community to do some redefinition of its mission and purpose. If that doesn’t happen quickly, the worshiping community may slide over the hill into quadrant 3 pretty quickly. Worshiping communities in quadrant 2 are still growing, though perhaps at a much slower pace. They are in a pattern of adding enough new members to offset annual losses that naturally occur, and until they slip over the hill, are adding more new members than their losses. Because the energy expended on growth in quadrant 1 shifts to ministry and administration as the worshiping community moves into quadrant 2, growth tends to slow. This is probably the BEST time for a congregation to consider birthing a new worshiping community.

Quadrant 3 - Declining

Worshiping communities in this quadrant at first would argue that they have not ventured over the hill and are still in quadrant 2. Indeed, it’s difficult to tell when that point happens. But at some point a congregation moves from thriving to less thriving, and if not checked, will continue down the quadrant 3 slope towards quadrant 4 (Struggling). Worshiping communities located in this quadrant have typically stopped growing, and at first are in a pattern of maintaining, which slides into patterns of more losses each year than gains. The worshiping community may become bureaucratized to the point where some people begin questioning whether it’s lost its sense of vision or purpose. The people and leaders may have lost their sense of urgency to be on mission, and yet may maintain financial stability



due to a large endowment, or by keeping a large enough member base to be able to maintain for years, and maybe even decades. Note in the diagram that some redefinition, if it occurs early in the community's time in quadrant 3, (requiring the leadership of an innovator, who is often not the "operator" leader who brought them here in the first place) the community can return to quadrant 2 without a lot of effort and monumental changes. If not, the community is at risk of catching "survival syndrome," which is characterized by some of the following: fundraising efforts to keep the doors open, letting staff go to keep functioning with a steadily decreasing budget, developing an attitude of scarcity thinking that replaces abundance thinking, conflict, and blame. A worshipping community at this stage needs a healer to lead them. The further the community continues sliding down the hill toward quadrant 4, the more work will be needed to redevelop the community back into a quadrant 3 community. Such work requires the leadership of an innovator who can help the community through the inevitable conflict that will come to move into healthier patterns.

Quadrant 4 – Struggling

Worshipping communities in this quadrant generally know that they are in trouble, because they, at some point, recognized that they were in quadrant 3 and tried to do something about it. They may have been engaged in major conflict, have developed unhealthy responses to conflict, and no longer have healthy systems in place. They may have slowly aged as a community, with their younger generations growing up and moving out. They are usually more engaged in maintenance than in mission at this stage. They are becoming less sustainable, and the further they move toward the end of the cycle, may come to realize that they are no longer vital and no longer sustainable. Quadrant 4 worshipping communities are at a crossroads, where they have to choose between doing nothing and inevitably closing their doors, intentionally closing their doors and using any remaining funds to help fund something else, merging with another congregation in a union or federated relationship, or completely rebirthing as something new.



Healthy Congregations Thrive

A Discernment Tool for Sessions and Staff



LIFELONG CHRISTIAN FORMATION

Does your church prioritize faith formation and disciple making?

1. Do you see people grow in their faith through participation in the activities of this congregation?
2. Would you say the following are emphasized in your church?
 - An intentional plan for lifelong faith formation or discipleship
 - Bible study
 - Christian education for all ages
 - Prayer circles, prayer chains, prayer partners, prayer walks, etc.
 - Teaching or practicing stewardship throughout the year
 - Other activities to engage in or learn about spiritual disciplines
3. Does this church....?
 - Challenge its members to become more Christ-like
 - Emphasize Sabbath keeping as a priority
 - Have a strong culture of generosity
 - Help members apply their faith to everyday life

HEALTHY SYSTEMS

Does your church maintain healthy systems in place that allow the church to live into its mission?

1. How true are the following statements?
 - Our congregation manages conflict well
 - We share our church financial picture, including sources and use of funds, with members
 - Our members can articulate our mission/purpose
 - This church has an intentional plan to help new members become and remain connected
 - Our members are hopeful or excited about this church's future
 - People here are nostalgic about this church's past
 - Decisions in this congregation are mainly made by staff/pastoral leadership rather than by session

- People expect leadership to do everything
2. Would you say that this church....?
 - Is willing to change to meet new challenges
 - Has clearly stated beliefs and values
 - Has a healthy sense of mission/purpose
 - Is open to diverse views
 - Helps its leaders avoid burnout
 - Has unresolved issues of scandal or drastic painful change
 - Has a strong connection with the presbytery
 - Has a strong connection with other congregations
 3. How often does the leadership of your church do the following?
 - Gather in prayer and discernment around God's mission
 - Evaluate programs and/or ministries
 - Evaluate staff

INTENTIONAL EVANGELISM

Does your church engage in evangelism ?

1. Does your church encourage members to...?
 - Be very open about being Christian when they engage in mission
 - Engage in theological discussions of truth and meaning with those outside our church
 - Invite others to worship or other church activities, including mission
 - Make specific efforts to form relationships with people who are not Christian
 - Make specific efforts to reach out to people who are in a different demographic than that of existing members
 - Openly share their faith
2. How often does the leadership of your church talk about evangelism in worship?
3. How true are the following statements?
 - We think of mission as a form of evangelism
 - Our outward communications make it clear that all are welcome regardless of who they are or what they have done
 - This church equips members to welcome all people
 - This church invites people being served by the church into the life of the congregation

OUTWARD INCARNATIONAL FOCUS

Does your church help others outside the church?

1. How true are the following statements?
 - We equip members for ministry wherever they are (community, school, hobby, work)
 - People in this community would not notice if our church closed
 - People in our community know our church leaders
2. Would you say that this church....?
 - Is a prophetic voice in our community
 - Responds to the needs of people in the local community or beyond
 - Promotes social righteousness issues within our community
 - Teaches that being the church is more important than being at church
 - Emphasizes mission over self-preservation

EMPOWERING SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Does your church foster servant leadership within the church?

1. How true are the following statements?
 - Sometimes we have a hard time finding people to volunteer to serve
 - We encourage members to identify and use their spiritual gifts
 - Staff and other leaders here model humility
2. Would you say that this church....?
 - Involves members in the planning of activities and worship
 - Has a plan to develop disciples who make disciples
 - Develops growing disciples into leaders
 - Emphasizes the importance of mentoring and spiritual direction

SPIRIT-INSPIRED WORSHIP

Does your church lead inspiring worship?

1. How well do the following terms describe worship services at this congregation?
 - Boring
 - Filled with a sense of God's presence
 - Filled with wonder
 - Frustrating
 - Inspirational

- Joyful
 - Renewing
 - Thought-provoking
2. Would you say that worship services at this church are designed to...?
- Allow time and space to communicate directly with God
 - Challenge participants' assumptions and convictions
 - Help participants be more open to God
 - Help participants be more open to others/humanity/neighbor
 - Help participants understand scripture
 - Encourage participants to take action

CARING RELATIONSHIPS HAPPEN

Does your church love and care for one another?

1. How true are the following statements?
- I am aware of serious conflict among members
 - I know there are members who have been hurt by this church
 - I observe informal cliques that others find it difficult to break into
 - I observe people warmly greeting one another before or after worship and at other events
 - We take care of members who are sick, grieving, or otherwise need support
 - We reach out to people who have not been to church in a while
 - We encourage small groups and/or fellowship groups so that caring relationships happen



7 Marks of Congregational Vitality

1. **LIFELONG Discipleship Formation** vs. *Complacent “Christian” piety, simply teaching good morals, or offering the latest programs.*

“The righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness of God based on faith.” Phil. 3:9b

Our church expresses these values:

- From the cradle to the grave seeking to be formed for right living with God and with all people.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- Faith – seeking understanding, cultivating wisdom, and actively following Christ; not an extra-curricular or merely head-knowledge.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- Discipleship awakened and engaged in issues facing today’s culture: injustice, inequality, divisive diversity, oppression, suffering, abuse of creation.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- Discipleship formed and strengthened in the community of Christ and permeates daily practices and daily living.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments on our lifelong disciple formation: _____

2. **Intentional Authentic Evangelism** vs. *“Jesus freaks”; “Christian” Hypocrisy; A committee.*

“We have this treasure in clay jars...may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God.” 2 Cor. 4:7

Our church expresses these values:

- Intentionally sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, not just acts of kindness.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- Authentically sharing Christ because it is intrinsic to self-identity; overflow of Christ in our life.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- Relational, not programmatic or systematic

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments on our intentional, authentic evangelism: _____

3. **Outward Incarnational Focus** vs. *Inward Institutional Survival; Closed communities of assimilation/exclusion.*

“The gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Matt. 7:14

Our church expresses these values:

- Outward exploration, awareness, and focus on neighbors and neighborhood.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- Beyond relationship with those of similar existence, the incarnate Christ dwells among the lowly & least, the stranger & the suffering, the marginalized & majority.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- Missional focus on where Christ is already living and present, and calling us to dwell.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments on our outward incarnational focus: _____

4. **Empowered Servant Leadership** vs. *the Pastor's job; monopolized leadership; hiring the young energetic pastor*

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers.”

Matt. 9:37-38.

Our church expresses these values:

- Identify, nurture, support the use of spiritual gifts of all people to serve; not monopolized cliques of power.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- All voices and people are necessary, and it is noticeable when people are absent/missing.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- Nurture and encourage those specifically called and gifted for pastoral ministry.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments on our empowering of servant leadership: _____

5. **Spirit-Inspired Worship** vs. *Self-gratifying worship, stale ritual divorced of meaning, or consumer entertainment worship*

“These people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote.” Isaiah 29:13

Our church expresses these values:

- Worship is about God. We get to come on holy ground, encounter God, and experience wonder.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- Worship is active participation in the living relationship of the triune God, thus *all* should feel welcome just as they are to come.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- Worship challenges, teaches, transforms, encounters, convicts, and sends people out different.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments on our Spirit-inspired worship: _____

6. **Caring Relationships** vs. *Any other Social Club; façades, hypocrisy, and judgment of “church” and “religion.”*

“By this everyone will know that you are disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35

Our church expresses these values:

- Sharing in God’s true agape moves us beyond half-hearted programmatic participation, lukewarm faith, and pretending.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- Instead of a closed, judgmental community, people find freedom to share stories, encounter the Savior, and ask for help.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- Welcome and hospitality are not left to a committee, but, imperfectly, we strive for *all* people find identity, purpose, and belonging in the household of God.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- Confront conflict, seek reconciliation in all divisions, find ways to embrace all diversity, seek to be peace-makers and bridge builders together.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments on our caring relationships: _____

7. **Ecclesial Health** vs. *Unhealthy dysfunction; toxic environments; obsolete and irrelevant buildings*

“The body does not consist of one member but of many. God has so arranged the body that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.” 1 Cor. 12: 14, 24b-25

Our church expresses these values:

- Understanding of: Why we are a church community? How are we a church community in practice? Prayer permeates all life together.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- Clarity in mission, core-values to ministry, passion and joy in being the church. Our budget reflects these values, vision, and ministries.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- Fiscally responsible– Stewardship and tithing are taught, transparency in spending, continual assessment/discernment of a sustainable budget.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- All are aware of how decisions are made, stake-holders in the process and procedures, valued voices in the envisioning, open to changes, continual assessment of the “why” and “how” we are church together.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- Nurturing and supporting the health of pastor(s), staff, and all called to lead; fighting against burnout.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments on our ecclesial health: _____

Instructions for Using the 7 Vital Signs of Healthy Congregations Scale

Purpose

There are two types of data generated by this scale: numerical data and commentary. Both types of data can help facilitate robust, vibrant, and edifying dialogue among leadership. The purpose of the data is not to “score” a particular “grade” but to discern those places where there is a common vision or divergent opinions among leadership about the health of the congregation; it is a paper version of a “continuum exercise.” The purpose of the 7 Marks of Healthy Congregations Scale, therefore, is to help churches, Sessions, and staff to do the following:

1. Encourage self-examination toward healthy self-awareness, honesty, and accountability.
2. Identify those topics where leadership has agreement / holds common values vs. those topics where there is significant divergence of opinion / perspective among leadership.
3. Focus leadership discussions on those topics most in need of clarity and shared vision.
4. Suggest possibilities of fruitful exploration toward growing deeper toward faithfulness to our call from God.

Process

1. Ask leadership to take one section of the 7 Vital Signs of Healthy Congregations Scale. (“Leadership” can mean elders, and/or deacons, and/or staff, and/or the entire congregation – you decide!)
2. Have respondents return their completed forms to the church. One person / committee should be tasked with compiling the data as follows:
 - a. Topic #1:
 - i. Numerical data for each individual value statement, focusing on a variation of finding the mode, as follows:¹
 1. # of Strongly Disagree, # of Disagree, # of Neutral, # of Agree, # of Strongly Agree
 - ii. List all comments
 - b. Topic #2...
3. Send the compiled data to retreat participants in advance of the meeting so they can review the results.
4. The topic of conversation will be to review the results to ask the following questions:
 - a. What do we well?
 - b. Where might we need to grow?
 - c. Where do we share a common vision, values, and/or self-evaluation?
 - d. Where do we have divergent views regarding our vision, values, and/or self-evaluation?
 - e. What might be some short-term goals for growing toward deeper faithfulness?
 - f. What resources do we have that help us in our faithfulness?
 - g. What resources might we need to cultivate as we grow toward deeper faithfulness?
 - h. What stands out as the call of God to us?

¹ This is not technically the mode because all value scores are listed, and so is called a variation of the mode. If leadership wants to identify the mean and median as well, that is fine. The point of scoring the numerical data in this way is to identify (a) points of agreement and disagreement, as well as (b) points of relative strength and weakness for each topic.



3 Assessment Sessions

Thrive Project

Overview:

Session 1 – Telling Our Story (August 2018)

Session 2 – Marks of Congregational Vitality (September 2018)

Session 3 – Revitalization Assessment (October 2018)

Session 1: Telling Our Story

Objective: In order to know where we are called to go, we must know where we have been. In Session 1, congregations will explore the history of their church and map their story together. For many congregations today, there is the misunderstanding that members know the story of a particular church and its mission. More and more members joining the Presbyterian church today did not grow up Presbyterian, and so this gives all members a chance to learn and explore the history of the church community. It is an opportunity to capture stories and perceptions of existing congregations in order to have a clear picture of who we are, where we came from, and discern who we are called to be.

Plan: Pastors, in consultation with their Session (or Revitalization Facilitators if necessary) should determine the plan to get all the congregation to participate in Telling Our Story. For example, churches that have a monthly fellowship event, or meal, might plan time to allow members to plot their story and map their history together. Others may choose to dedicate Sunday school time or form church-wide small groups.

Preparation: We encourage Sessions to prepare bullet points with key points in the church's history, or to make archives available to the congregation during this month. Pastors may choose to focus a sermon series during this month on Exploring Our Story. *Please remember that the Presbyterian Historical Society, Montreat, Columbia Theological Seminary, and the Office of General Assembly can be used to resource congregations with historical information.*

Session 1 Outline

Opening Prayer

Chapter 1: Historical Story Mapping

1. When was the church founded? By whom?
 2. Where and under what circumstances was your church established? What is your church's identity?
 3. Historically map the leaders of the church.
 4. Track membership trends of the congregation.
 5. Map membership: who typically joins your church?
 6. Map the Missional Statements of the church from its establishment to present day. Has the mission changed?
 7. Track significant changes in the church's history.
 8. Track significant struggles or conflict.
 9. Track significant triumphs.
 10. Map important ministries that live out the church's mission.
- *Note:* <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/en/> - Story mapping is a helpful resource that allows for data information to creatively be collected and shared with members. Churches may want to create video or artistic displays in capturing each chapter of their story.

Chapter 2: Our Story

- Encourage all members, of every age, to capture in image or in writing what they believe the essence of the church's vision and mission is together. Children may draw pictures of what they think of when they think of their church. Adults may answer in a written reflection: "Our church will forever be marked in history as the church who..." Photos or paintings may be used to depict the essence of what the church means to individuals, or a story may be shared of a time when the church became an individual's church for them.

Chapter 3: Theological and Biblical Perspective

- The pastor in collaboration with the session, and with feedback from the congregation, should determine the essential tenets of the church, by responding to the following phrases:
 - The purpose of our church is...
 - We believe God has called us together to...
 - We are unwilling to waiver on...
 - We follow as disciples of Jesus Christ by....
 - We are known as the church that...

Chapter 4: A Closer Look

- Mapping the last 10 years of a church's story will help to engage the Spirit's presence and leading in life together, in order to discern where the Lord is calling church's to follow. In exploration together, map the last 10 years of your congregation.
 1. Track 10 year membership trends. Note members who left, age-shifts, and major changes.
 2. Track 10 year annual budget. Note changes, spending, and stewardship and tithing trends.
 3. Track 10 year shifts in leadership, changes to ministries, significant events, major struggles.
 4. Track 10 year vitality in living into God's mission for your church (use the 7 marks of Vitality).

To be continued...

Session 2: Marks of Congregational Vitality

Objective: In order to discern where the Spirit is leading us to follow as disciples of Jesus Christ, we must know who we are and where we are. Session 2 takes a close examination of who we are as a particular church, by focusing inward on our mission, vision, and purpose. It also focuses outward on who others say that we are, by exploring the neighborhood and particular context to which we exist. We explore who we are, by turning to the God to whom we belong and have our being, and we worship in the spirit of truth and openness to the wonder of God.

Plan: This Assessment session should take place in a worship service (*Evangelism Sunday*) in September 2018. Congregations will take the PC(USA) Vital Congregations Survey. This survey will be taken by all members, by officers of the church, and by the staff.

- The pastor in collaboration with the Session will examine and formulate a plan for the worship service to take place and for the debriefing to occur after the sending out into a Neighborhood Analysis occurs.
- Session and church staff should take the Vital Congregations Survey during monthly meeting. They should also plot themselves on the Life-Cycle of the Church chart.

Preparation: Pastors and session should distribute and plan for discussion of the Life-Cycle information prior to the worship service. Plans should also be made prior to the worship service about the Neighborhood Analysis exercise and the debriefing process that follows. Each Neighborhood Group will need a facilitator willing to lead the exercise.

Outline for Worship

Prayer of the Day

God of all life and truth: How wondrous that you called and claimed us for Sabbath community. How amazing your mystery that transforms all people gathered in your name. Accept our worship, Lord, for you alone are worthy of all honor and praise. Revitalize our lives in Spirit and in truth, so that we daily shine your light, share your grace, and pour out your love to all neighbors. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Chapter 5: Prayer of Confession

(Unison) No one is without sin. Every person, every church is flawed and fallen. Yet this truth is too easily swept under the rug. We are often too quick to ignore our shortcomings and failures. We fear the unknown. We resist the call to change. Yet if we confess, in this moment, where we are and where we fall short of the glory of God, then our Lord is merciful and will revitalize and redeem Christ's church. In the spirit of truth, let us confess where we are as individuals in discipleship formation, and collectively as the church. Let us pray to the one who saves and redeems us all.

- Members should be invited to turn in confessional cards that reflect individually and corporately on where we fall short living faithfully to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and where we've build idols in Christ's Church.
- *A plan should be made to gather Confessional Cards of members absent from worship.*
- Session will write a report of the results of the congregation and add it as Chapter 5 in Our Story for the congregation to explore.

Suggested Scriptures: Luke 10: 1-11; Deuteronomy 11: 13-21; Romans 12: 1-21; Psalm 133

Responding to the Word

Prayers of the People: Vital Congregations Survey should be taken by the entire congregation (*with a plan to collect surveys from absent members*). In this time, people will individually have time to take the PC(USA) survey, based upon the 7 Marks of Vitality, and will be collected to be scored by the PC(USA) office. This allows members the opportunity to focus their response in prayer.

- The Session and Church staff will take survey in monthly meetings. All surveys should be collected and turned in to the PC(USA) for results.

Sending: Neighborhood Analysis

In joining with our brothers and sisters in the neighborhood, we learn who we truly are in the communities to which we exist. We learn what the needs are, and whether we are who we say we believe ourselves to be. Mainly, we live as a sent community, going forth to share the Good News of Jesus Christ by showing up in the neighborhoods to which we belong.

- The Neighborhood Experience should be distributed prior to worship and a plan made for members to walk the neighborhood, have lunch, talk with people, observe and engage the neighborhood.
- Session, in collaboration with the pastor, should develop a plan to collect the reports of the Neighborhood Analysis. For example: Your church may use a social media platform for folks to report, the following Sunday to hand in reports, or email a session member or pastor.
- A plan should be made for those members unable to attend worship to do their Neighborhood Analysis during the week, since we are sent out Monday-Saturday.
- For churches located outside the bounds of a neighborhood, in rural areas: Encourage members to focus on where they live, who and what is around them, and what does this mean for our mission together?

Chapter 6: Debriefing Neighborhood Analysis:

Session and pastor(s) should plan the crucial work of debriefing with the congregation! This will be an opportunity for important discussion, gathering people's experience in the neighborhood, and reflecting upon who we are and where we are as a church people. These experiences should be collected and put in Chapter 6 of Our Story. The following questions can be used to help facilitate conversations:

- What did you experience in the neighborhood? What surprised you? What did you learn?
- Who did you encounter? Are there different people in the neighborhood not in your church?
- How has the neighborhood changed over the years?
- What do people say about your church?
- How have people seen your church show up for the neighborhood; responding to needs?
- Did you become aware of any needs not yet being met?

To be Continued...

Neighborhood Analysis Exercise

Group Preparation

1. Lead Dwelling in the Word on Luke 10: 1-11 (attached)
2. Introduce the idea of a neighborhood visit. Emphasize that the goal is to get to know more about the neighborhood and its people. We do this by using all 5 senses. We are not going out to teach anything, to convert anyone, or to change the neighborhood, just to learn from the people who know more about it than we do.
3. Ask participants if they have any ideas how they can learn about the neighborhood. They will probably mention looking at the houses and businesses, observing what kind of services are available, listening to what languages are spoken, talking to people, etc. Press them to come up with as many ideas as possible by asking, “what else?”
4. Explain parameters:
 - They will be going out 2 by 2 just as Jesus sent the disciples (3 is OK if you have an uneven number)
 - What time they need to return
 - Pray with your partner before leaving the building – that you will find the right people to talk to, that you would be observant and respectful.
5. Give three assignments:
 - Buy something to eat or drink (I often send them out over lunch and ask them to buy their lunch in the community)
 - Talk to at least one person
 - Bring back a token
6. Give the list of things to look for (attached)

Dwelling in the Word

Luke 10: 1-11

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ²He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ ⁶And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. ⁸Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ ¹⁰But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’

Reflect:

1. Listen to the passage.
2. Underline any words or phrases that stand out.
3. Sit quietly with those words.
4. What message do you hear?
5. Share with another person.

Debrief Observations:

- Who do you see? Describe the people.
- What are they doing?
- What conversations do you observe?
- Are people alone or in groups?
- Do you see people walking on the streets? Driving? Sitting? Biking?
- How are the people dressed? Pay attention to details such as shoes, jewelry, hair and clothing styles.
- What do you hear and smell?
- Pay attention to the town infrastructure: sidewalks, streetlights, stop lights, signage. What do they tell you about the community?
- Describe the houses you see: single family, apartments, condos? Are they well cared for? Do you see toys in the yards? Cars parked out front? What can you tell about the community?
- What kind of signage do you see? Advertising? Fliers on telephone poles?
- What is your overall impression of the community?
- Is there anything that you might expect to see in a community that seems to be missing?
- Describe the commercial district: what stores do you see? What stores are not present? What signs of commercial vibrancy do you see?
- What businesses do you observe? Can you get a sense of what people in this community do for a living?
- Where are the children? Is there a school in the community? What signs of children or youth activities do you notice?
- What leisure activities can you observe? Is there a gym, movie theater, sports facility, etc.
- What churches or other community gathering places do you observe?

Session 3: Revitalization Assessment

Objective: Your church has now explored who you have been and your present life together. Session 3 (October 2018) is about exploring and discerning where your church is going. It is about confessing the necessary work and faithfully following God into transforming wonder of making all things new. With your 7 Marks Survey results, chapters 1-6 of your church's story, neighborhood experiences, and a report from your presbytery leaders, this Session will now take your church deeper in exploring, discerning, and living faithfully into where God is leading you to follow.

Plan: Pastors, in consultation with their Session (or Revitalization Facilitators if necessary) should explore their assessment process in their monthly meeting. This should be a time of confession, discernment, and suggestions to the congregation. A summary report should be prepared for the congregation, and results shared to the Survey, chapters 1-6 of the church's story, and the presbytery report.

The Session Report (Chapter 7) should be sent to congregation with invitation to gather their important voice in the exploring and discernment process at a Celebration Sunday. Reformation Sunday should be used as an opportunity for the church to celebrate its story, and to gather their voice and input in discerning action. This can be a town hall luncheon, small group forums, time dedicated in worship.

Preparation: Pastors will need to send Survey results, 6 chapters of Church Story, and Presbytery Report prior to Session Meeting. Session Report and suggestion should be shared. Plan Reformation Sunday details to include a time of celebration and gathering congregation's input.

- *Note:* Chapters 1-8 of your congregation's story will be shared with the Presbytery & the PC(USA) in the Show Your Marks Campaign (Advent), as a new measurement of vital life together.

Session Meeting

Opening Prayer

Living God – you are not finished with any of us yet. You transform in wonder and power. You call us to join you in walking paths of grace and love, throughout this broken and fearful world. We know the victory belongs to Christ. You withheld nothing when Christ died to redeem and restore all of creation. And Christ gathered us as Church, telling us that nothing can separate us from His love. Because of who Christ is, we gather as church, to live transcending culture, and to join in Christ's redeeming work in our neighborhoods and throughout the earth. God, help us to dream and hope, help us to live in bold faith saying, "Here I am, Lord. Send me." Help us to live in vitality of your Spirit and the joy of your community, until we get to see you face-to-face. Lord, as we discern, as we confess the truth of our church, as we seek your will and your plan for our life together, may we be courageous and committed to following in the paths of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Discussion Questions

1. What have you learned about your church's story?
2. Discuss your identity. Has your identity changed? Has your mission changed?
3. What did you learn in story mapping, Neighborhood Analysis, presbytery report, congregation's voices?
4. What work still needs to be done? What things need to change? What things are stale?
5. What did you learn about your church's vitality?
6. Discuss where you imagine the Spirit might be leading you in action of 7 Vital Marks & 3-Revitalizing Actions.
7. Name your fears, frustrations, and sorrow in necessary revitalization/transformation.
8. What is your hope for this church community?

9. What does your church look like tomorrow? How is it vital in life together and faithfulness to God and neighbors?
10. What will it take to get there? What is the necessary work to the new thing Christ is doing in your church?

Chapter 7 Summary Report & Planning:

Session in consultation with the pastors should develop a Summary Report to the congregation which includes: Survey results, summary of Presbytery Report, Summary of Session discernment and suggestion of actions moving forward. Planning for Congregation Discernment/Celebration should be made (Reformation Sunday).

Closing Prayer: All officers should be invited to join in prayer for the will of God and the people of God in this beloved community. These prayers should be recorded for the Summary Report for the congregation (Chapter 7)

Congregation Celebration & Discernment

Congregation should celebrate chapters 1-7 of their life together (Reformation Sunday). In knowing where we've been and where we are, we can now better discern the Spirit's leading in where we are going; walking in faithfulness and hope of God. Whether this is a luncheon, small group forums, or worship experience, all voices of the church should be heard in the exploration and discernment process.

Opening Prayer

Living God – you are not finished with any of us yet. You transform in wonder and power. You call us to join you in walking paths of grace and love, throughout this broken and fearful world. We know the victory belongs to Christ. You withheld nothing when Christ died to redeem and restore all of creation. And Christ gathered us as Church, telling us that nothing can separate us from His love. Because of who Christ is, we gather as church, to live transcending culture, and to join in Christ's redeeming work in our neighborhoods and throughout the earth. God, help us to dream and hope, help us to live in bold faith saying, "Here I am, Lord. Send me." Help us to live in vitality of your Spirit and the joy of your community, until we get to see you face-to-face. Lord, as we discern, as we confess the truth of our church, as we seek your will and your plan for our life together, may we be courageous and committed to following in the paths of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Chapter 8 – Celebrating the Life God Has Given

Congregational responses in this discernment should be captured in some way (i.e. video, narrative, written responses).

1. What parts of our story, ministry, and life together are you most thankful for?
2. What are the most significant parts of our story? What will our church legacy be?
3. How has this church lived a vital life together? How have we shared God's love and been about the work of the Kingdom?
4. What parts of our reports, surveys, neighborhood exercise, and story startling, sad, confusing, difficult to acknowledge?
5. How have we fallen short of the glory of God in our life together? What things do we need to confess that we've done or left undone?
6. From all the truth of our story, where do you believe God is calling us to courageously follow in faith?
7. Explore what transformation, new vital life of being church might look like for your church.
8. What are your hopes and prayers to God in the next chapters of your church's story?

Closing Prayer of Celebration and Hope

To be continued....