



Training #3:

## **Sharing Our Learning**

Intentional Reflection on Our Actions



88Nine Radio Milwaukee  
220 E. Pittsburgh Ave.

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# Faithful Innovation

## Learning Communities

### **What is a Learning Community?**

A learning community is a group of congregations who commit to one another in a nine-month learning experience. Through prayer, skill-building, action and reflection they address pressing questions about the future. The experience includes three Saturday workshops and ongoing coaching calls with synod leaders and trained process coaches.

### **What will we be doing together?**

#### **Gathering for One-Day Trainings**

We will gather for three one-day training sessions designed to help us discover together what faithful innovation looks like in each of our contexts.

#### **Monthly Coaching**

Every month your congregational team will connect in person or via online video to receive coaching and share learnings.

#### **Trying New Actions**

In-between trainings each congregation will try out some new actions designed to help you learn more about what God is doing in your midst and how to join in God's work.

# Training Descriptions

## Training #1: Tracing God's Movement in Our Lives and Neighborhoods

This first training helps equip participants to listen to God in their local contexts. Participants will dwell in Scripture together, share stories about what God is doing in the life of their local church, and notice where God might be at work in their everyday lives. The goal for these practices is to help the participants begin to answer the question, "What might God be up to?"

## Training #2 - Learn by Doing: Using Action Learning to Discover God's Leading

In our second Learning Community training, we will focus on helping participants use action learning to deepen their exploration of what they think God might be up to. The idea is to help participants "behave their way into new thinking," rather than only trying to think their way into new behaviors. Participants will be given simple action learning experiments to try with others in their congregation.

## Training #3 - Sharing Our Learning: Intentional Reflection on Our Actions

**Our third training will focus on learning to share what we've learned from the action learning experiments we did. Action learning requires intentional reflection on what was done so we can see what God might be teaching us!**

## Agenda:

Training #1: *Tracing God's Movement in our Lives and Neighborhoods*

Training #2: *Learn by Doing: Using Action Learning to Discover God's Leading*

### **Training #3: *Sharing Stories: Intentional Reflections on Our Actions* – Agenda**

- 1:30 Arrive early to order a drink from Stone Creek Coffee (optional)
- 2:00 Welcome and Dwelling in Scripture Together (Acts 16:6-15)
- 2:45 Reflecting on Our Actions – Failure, Energy & God's Vision
- 2:55 Sharing Our Stories – Part 1
- 3:25 Break**
- 3:40 Sharing Our Stories – Part 2
- 4:10 What Might God Be Leading Us to Do Next? (Asking God Questions)
- 4:40 Planning Next Steps
- 5:00 Planning Second Round Experiments
- 5:50 Where Have You Seen God at Work Today?
- 6:00 Adjourn

# Dwelling in the Word

Dwelling in the Word is an ancient way of reading the Scripture. Dwelling in the Word is a way of spiritually submitting to the text as one way God speaks to us, with a willingness to be shaped by what God might want to say through the Scripture. In this way, we are being interpreted by the text together as we listen to it.

Three questions guide our listening:

1. What caught your attention?
2. What question would you want to ask?
3. What are we hearing in this text (where might the Spirit be nudging us)?

The process of dwelling in a particular text is as follows.

## Listen to the Word Together

- Pray that God would speak to us
- Read the text, slowly
- Allow for silence
- Read again
- Allow for silence

## Listen to Someone Else

- Find one person you can share your thoughts about the text with, a “reasonably friendly looking stranger,” someone you maybe don’t know well
- Spend 4-5 minutes each sharing about what caught your imagination, or a question you have, or what you think the Spirit might be saying

## Share in a Group

- Share in a group of 6-8 people what you heard your conversation partner say

***What might God be saying to us as a group? What are you hearing?***

# Dwelling in the Word



## Acts 16:6-15

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

### Questions:

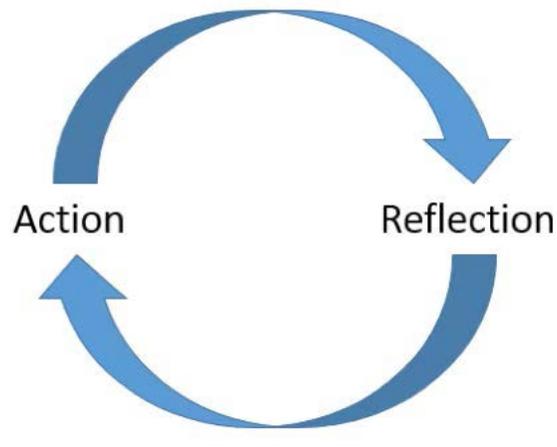
What catches your attention in this passage?

What questions does this passage create for you?

What do you think God might be saying to you as a group through this passage?

# Reflecting on Our Actions

A key practice that is often left out in processes of congregational change is this simple but powerful step of reflecting on what we have done. Reflection is, perhaps, the most difficult and yet the most important in terms of a congregation starting to self-consciously reflect on what it has done. Without this practice of reflection getting into the bones and rhythms of a congregation's life, the first three practices will be little more than a moment of trying something before moving on to something else. Once you have completed your experiments, it is important to reflect on what you have learned. It is through your reflections that you will uncover what your next actions might be.



As you continue to engage in more experiments and reflect on what you are learning, you will begin to see transformation unfold in your congregations. This ongoing cycle of action-reflection learning allows us to act our way into new ways of thinking.

# Experiment Stories: Failure, Energy, and God's Vision

## Learning from Failure

Failure is a normal part of learning and trying new things.

- Has anything you have tried felt like it has failed so far?
- What did it look like?
- What did you learn from that?

## Discovering New Energy

Partnering with God in a new way often results in a release of new energy in and outside the congregation.

- Did your experiment seem to generate some new energy with your Guiding Team, the participants in your experiment, or both?
- Why do you think there was new energy?

## Uncovering God's Vision

As we behave our way into new thinking we begin to see a picture of the future God might have in mind for our congregation.

- How might God be inviting you into partnership with God's work in the neighborhood?
- What clues could be pointing you in a new direction?

# Sharing Stories – What We Did and What We Learned

## MAIN QUESTIONS:

1. What did we do? What happened?
  
2. **What did we learn?** (See page 8 for more good questions to spur reflection)
  - What did we learn from failing?
  - Where did we discover new energy?
  - How is God inviting us into the neighborhood?
  - What new questions do we have now?
  
3. What might God be nudging us to consider as a next step?
  - How can we share what we are learning?
  - How might God be leading our team to move forward in light of what we learned through our experiment(s)?

# What Might God Be Leading Us to Do Next?

## *Asking God Questions of your Stories*

So you've completed some listening work and tried out some action learning experiments. Now what? It can be difficult to determine what the next step should be.

The key to determining the next step is learning to ask "God questions" of the work you have done so far. While it may be helpful to do more listening, more experimenting, and more story sharing, the goal is to determine ways in which you think God might be inviting you to partner with the work God is already doing.

Here are a few examples of "God questions" you can ask of your work so far:

- As you listened to others, in what ways did they say God had impacted their lives (i.e. through relationships, experiences, Scripture, church activities, etc.)
- As you paid attention to your "neighborhood," in what ways did you notice God was present or active?
- As you listened to Scripture together, what themes or insights did God bring about in your conversations?
- When you share your stories about your action learning experiments, where did God bring new energy to your team and your congregation?
- Was there any way that God brought surprise through your action learning experiment?
- Where did you notice any ways people were hurting or suffering as you engaged in your action learning experiment? How do you think God wants to respond to that hurting or suffering?
- When you listen to the stories of others who engaged in an action learning experiment, do you see any themes that God may want you to pay attention to? Or is there one particular story that God is using to really grab your heart?
- What might God be leading your congregation to try next?

Think about these three practices you've experienced this year as tools in your toolbox: listening, experimenting, sharing stories. How might God want you to use them to engage the people in your congregation and your neighborhoods?

## Planning Next Steps

Your Assignment: Listen, Experiment, Share

### Determine Next Steps

Your primary assignment is to determine how your congregation wants to participate in these learning communities going forward. There are several options available to you:

- Continue to engage in this process for the next year, come to the trainings and keep learning together
  - This may mean your Guiding Team stays the same and you all continue on this journey together
  - This may mean some of your Guiding Team changes, you add new members, and the new team continues together
- Take what you have learned and apply to it to the regular ministry life of your congregation. How might the practices of listening for God, trying new experiments, and sharing stories help your congregation do its ministry in your own context?

In either case, how might you continue to incorporate these **core practices** into your ministry?

- Dwelling in the Word
- Listening to each other (inside the church)
- Walking / engaging our neighborhoods (where is the Spirit nudging?)
- Listening to our neighbors (outside the church)
- Using Action / Reflection to learn from both “success” & “failure” to make us more agile

In either case, consider asking these kinds of questions:

- Where can we integrate the practices above more deeply?
- How can we invite a larger group of people into the practices above?
- Is there a ministry area/focus in which we could utilize these practices?
- What listening do we still have to do? What do we still need to know?
- Based on what we have learned so far, what actions might we try?
- How can we find new ways to share stories of our learnings so that others in the congregation are invited into this action/reflection?

### Gather

Continue to meet as a Guiding Team to discuss your next steps as a congregation. These meetings could help you determine who will remain on your guiding team if you plan to continue in this learning community. If you choose not to remain in the cohort with other congregations, consider whether you want to continue to use your coach. If so, work out the details (compensation, timing) with your coach.

### Continue to Dwell in the Word

Plan to listen to some part of Scripture together at each of your meetings. Invite other groups in your congregation to begin using this practice when they gathered. Keep track of what you are learning as you engage this practice.

### Do More Listening, Experimenting, and Sharing

Now that you have experienced all three trainings, consider the following action steps:

- Is there more listening work your team would like to engage in to help your congregation become more aware of the ways God is present and at work in your midst?
- Is there another action learning experiment your team would like to invite people to try?
- Are there stories you want to be sure and share with the congregation and the neighborhood from your experiences in this process so far?

KEY QUESTION: WHAT MIGHT GOD BE UP TO?

**Next Training Date:**  
**Saturday, January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020**  
**9:00 - 3:00**  
**Location TBD**

## APPENDIX 1

# Finding Innovative Spaces in Your Own Neighborhood

Successful innovation work requires participants to step outside their comfort zones and consider new ways to approach challenges. The physical environment where this work happens can greatly affect the outcome—either positively or negatively. For church innovation work in particular, meeting in a neutral, non-church location frees participants to think creatively by allowing them to have physical and psychological distance from everyday challenges.

The design of innovative spaces fosters creative thinking. The best spaces feature flexible seating arrangements, whiteboards or flipcharts, natural light, and access to technology. These spaces are sometimes available at little or no cost to rent. It may take some research and legwork to find innovative spaces in your community, but the extra effort is worth it. **You'll actually build new relationships in your neighborhood or area simply by having to look for spaces to be hosted.** Here are some ways to get your search started.

### Suggested locations for innovative spaces

- Local museums and galleries
- Community rooms at coffee shops or market co-ops
- Meeting spaces at nonprofits
- Classrooms at colleges and universities
- Local libraries or public schools
- City community centers
- Historic spaces repurposed as meeting rooms
- Spaces within YMCA locations
- Local foundation meeting rooms
- Event spaces at regional shopping malls



For additional help, contact your city or state's Chamber of Commerce, Visitors Association, Convention and Visitors Bureau, or Department of Tourism. These organizations often keep directories of meeting spaces, and they may be aware of innovative spaces that aren't widely known to the general public. Their services are usually free, and they might be able to help negotiate a better rate on your rental.

## APPENDIX 2

# SUMMARIZING & SHARING LEARNINGS WITH OTHERS

The resources in the Faithful Innovation process have been about learning a new way of listening, experimenting, and sharing stories of God's action in the world and in the church.

If your team is discerning that it is the right time to bring your formal work to a close, use the questions below to consider how you might share your learnings and some of the practices with other leaders in your congregation.

What were some of your group's key learnings? Where did your group sense God's presence or leading?

(Look back at page 10 in this guide for helpful questions to spur thoughts here)

What insights from those key learnings feel most important to share with other leaders at your congregation? What is a creative way you could share these insights?

Where could you imagine the action/reflection process being a helpful tool in the life of your congregation?

What do you imagine God might be leading your congregation to consider next?

Think about these **three practices** you've experienced this year as tools in your toolbox: **listening**, **experimenting**, **sharing stories**. How might God be inviting you and other leaders to use them to engage the people in your congregation and your neighborhoods?

## APPENDIX 3

# ACTION LEARNING EXPERIMENT ASSIGNMENT OPTIONS

We encourage your guiding team to think about possible action learning experiments you want to try in two major categories: investing presence and investing relationship. We hope these categories will help you imagine how you can “learn by doing” in some of the areas of focus surfaced by your listening work. Below you will find a description of what these categories mean and how you might choose to experiment with each of them.

### *Action Learning Experiment Category #1: Investing Presence*

Many of you may have found in your listening work that there are places in your communities that you feel God might be inviting you to invest more of your time and a presence in an effort to better understand what God might be doing there.

Is there a place you came across in your “neighborhood” that you could spend more time in just to see what God might be doing there?

Examples:

- Barbershop/Hair Salon
- Skate park where kids hangout
- Coffeeshop
- Laundromat
- Farm Supply Store
- Grocery store
- Library
- Movie Theater
- Food Pantry
- Craft Brewery
- Neighborhood fair/street fair
- Farmers’ Markets

Once you identify a place, consider spending an extended period of time there on more than one occasion over the next few months (30-60 minutes each visit for 3 visits).

While you are there, ask yourself some questions:

- How would I describe the people here?
- Why are people gathering here?
- What makes me comfortable or uncomfortable in this space?
- What do I think God is doing in the lives of the people here?
- What might God be up to in this space?

Another category we suggest you consider when thinking about action learning experiments is investing relationship. Through your listening work, you may have come across people that you think God might want you to be better connected to as a congregation.

**Action Learning Experiment Category #2: Investing Relationship**

Are there people that God introduced you to through your listening work over the last few months that God might want you to develop more relationship with?

- Someone you interviewed
- Someone you didn't know in your congregation until recently
- Someone you came across while walking the neighborhood and taking pictures
- A leader in your neighborhood/town
- An actual physical neighbor
- A co-worker
- Someone you just happened to meet

If you can identify someone or a group of people you think God might want you to get to know better, consider some ways you might engage with them over the next 3 months. Examples include:

- Inviting a neighbor over for dinner (and maybe even asking them to share some of their spiritual journey with you)
- Getting to know the name and something about a person who works somewhere you regularly go (i.e. coffeeshop, store, library, etc.)
- Helping to organize a National Night Out party (August 7<sup>th</sup>)
  - Consider putting together a kit for people in your congregation who would be willing to help organize a NNO party
- Getting invited over to a neighbor's house for dinner and sharing some of your spiritual journey with them
- Going to a sporting/music/art event of a child of someone you know

## APPENDIX 4

# ACTION LEARNING EXPERIMENT ASSIGNMENT OPTIONS

Examples of Action Learning Experiments You Could Try

A. Prayer Experiment (INVESTING PRESENCE) – Go to a summer neighborhood event, like a county fair or farmers market gathering, and set up a table with your church’s name displayed and bunch of strips of cloth on the table. Invite people to write down prayers they have on the strips of cloth and hang them on a display.

B. Sit on the Front Lawn (INVESTING PRESENCE) – Set up some lawn chairs in the front of wherever you live and commit to sitting in those chairs on a regular basis. Pay attention to what is going on around you, who is outside, what is the neighborhood like, what do you think God might be doing in the neighborhood?

C. Listen to Spiritual Stories (INVESTING RELATIONSHIP) – After a congregation spent time developing their capacity to listen to each other’s spiritual stories, they decided to bring that practice into a ministry they are already involved in with women experiencing homelessness. Identify a ministry your church is already involved in where you could make deeper connections with neighbors and practice listening to their spiritual stories.

D. Go See a Baseball Game (INVESTING RELATIONSHIP) – Are their children in your congregation or in your neighborhood who are engaged in a sport, music or art activity over the summer. Consider going to one of their games/recitals/shows to show an interest in what they are doing. When you go, ask what God might be doing in the lives of all the people gathered there.

E. Eat with Your Neighbor (INVESTING RELATIONSHIP) – Consider developing enough relationship with a neighbor that you can share a meal with that person. See if you can ask that person to tell you one significant story about their spiritual journey during the meal and be willing to share your own.

F. Borrow a Tool (INVESTING RELATIONSHIP) – Practice engaging your neighbors by borrowing something from them. Could be a lawn tool, a cup of milk, or something else. This will put you in a place where you are vulnerable with your neighbors, allowing them to serve you.

G. Hang out in a New Place (INVESTING PRESENCE) – Maybe there was a place that you noticed when listening to your neighborhood that you’re not as familiar with. Consider planning to spend 30 minutes there several different times over the course of the summer. Who is there? What are they doing? How do you sense God’s presence?

H. Pray at the Laundromat (INVESTING RELATIONSHIP) – Go to a local Laundromat several times. Get permission to set up a table, offer to pay for people’s laundry and also pray for them.

## APPENDIX 5

# EXPERIMENT DESIGN WORKSHEET

1. Name what you want to learn (learning objective).

*How is this based on your listening work?*

*Why do you want to learn this?*

2. Describe the specific steps you will take in the experiment.

*Remember: the more detailed you are, the lower the anxiety for those participating!*

3. Create a feedback loop.

*How will you build into the experiment a time for reflection at the end?*

*How will you ask "God" questions to reflect?*

*During this post-experiment reflection time, discuss how to share your learnings with the congregation.*

## APPENDIX 6

# Action Learning Experiments

### What is an experiment?

An experiment in this process is a planned action-learning experience that is designed to help us “behave our way into new thinking.”

### What is the point of experiments?

Experiments are the best way to learn when we are faced with challenges that require us to adapt and do something differently than we have done it before. Experiments create space for us to discover new ways to be the church in our context.

### What makes an experiment successful?

The success of an experiment is determined by how much we learn and are transformed by the experience rather than by how much impact our actions have on others.

### How do you design a good experiment?

There are 3 major steps to designing an experiment:

1. Name what you want to learn.
2. Describe the steps you will take in the experiment.
3. Create a feedback loop.

## APPENDIX 7

# Action Learning Experiment Example: Riding the Casino Bus

### Learning Objective:

We want to learn what God is doing in the lives of the people who ride on the casino bus from our neighborhood.

### Why do we want to learn this?

In our listening work, we noticed this free, purple bus daily picking people up from our neighborhood, and we felt led by God to focus on what was happening on those buses.

### What steps are we going to take?

1. Recruit 8 people to participate in the experiment
2. Use the bus schedule to find a time when we can all get on a bus
3. Split up in pairs so as not to freak anyone out
4. Pray that God would open up conversations for us on the bus
5. Get on the bus and sit next to someone we don't know (which was everyone)
6. Look for an opportunity to start a conversation and ask about the person's experience of the casino (i.e. first time there, go there regularly, like it, don't like it, favorite parts of going?)
7. If asked why you are on the bus, respond by saying you were interested in knowing more about who uses this bus service in this community and why

### What is our feedback loop?

We planned to eat at the casino buffet and discuss our experience of riding the bus and talking to people, with a focus on the question, "What do we think God is doing in the lives of the people who ride the casino bus?"