



Training #2:

Learn by Doing

Using Action Learning to Discover God's Leading

May 5th, 2019

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 Sunday 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!

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

Training #2: *Learn by Doing:*

Using Action Learning to Discover God's Leading - Agenda

1:30	Arrive early to order a drink from Velobahn Coffee
2:00	Welcome and Dwelling in Scripture Together (Acts 16:6-15)
2:45	You Are Here: Where We Have Been and Where We are Going Next Step: Action Learning Experiments
3:25	Break
3:40	Case Study: Pretend Church
4:20	Action Learning Experiment Assignment Options
4:45	Team Planning Time – Choose an Experiment, Invite the Congregation
5:45	Where Have You Seen God at Work Today?
6:00	Adjourn

Training #3: *Sharing Stories:*

Intentional Reflections on Our Actions

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?

You Are Here:

Where We Have Been and Where We are Going

- *Tracing God's Movement – Listening and paying attention for where God may be at work.*
- *Learn by Doing – Using action learning to discover God's leading.*
- *Sharing Stories – Intentionally reflecting on our actions.*

Sharing What We've Learned: Reviewing Work since Last Training

1. Listen to Others

- a. What's one thing your Guiding Team learned from listening to people in your congregation?
- b. What's one thing your Guiding Team learned from having to do this assignment (or empower other people to do it)?

2. Dwelling in the Word (Acts 16)

- a. What did your Guiding Team learn from listening to this text?
- b. How did you use the dwelling exercise in your congregation?
- c. What did your Guiding Team learn from doing this practice of listening to Acts 16 together and encouraging other people to do it?

3. Walking the Neighborhood

- a. If you did this exercise, share what you remember from the experience. If you did not, don't despair! There will always be more chances to use this simple practice.

Next Step: 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.

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?"

Case Study: Pretend Lutheran Church

Pretend Lutheran Church

Pretend had a Guiding Team of 3 people who did some of the listening work assigned in the last training. Here's some of what they learned.

Listening to Others

The team originally felt overwhelmed by the prospect of interviewing 8-10 people with the questions about when people felt most spiritually alive. They weren't sure how they would ask people these questions because they seemed quite personal. They also weren't sure when they would ask people to have these conversations because it seemed like trying to do it on a Sunday might be too much for people.

However, the team learned a couple things as they tried to figure out how to do this assignment. First, they learned that other people were willing to be listeners along with them and they didn't have to do all the interviews themselves. Two people in the parish were willing to help do the interviews, and that helped lighten the load of the work. These people felt honored to be invited to listen to others; it was a way they had never been asked to serve in the parish before. Second, they learned that people responded very well to being personally invited to share their stories. Once people understood the point of the listening interviews, they were willing to share their stories. Several of the interviews really produced meaningful conversations that were deeper than people were used to experiencing.

The content of the listening sessions also produced some interesting insights. The interviews revealed that not many people had a space to talk about this part of their life. But people have had very significant experiences in their relationship with God that have greatly shaped their life. Those experiences came through a variety of life circumstances, both periods of suffering and struggle as well as periods of personal discovery and success. Many people had never been invited to name these kinds of experiences as something "God was doing," but when they thought back on it they could clearly see God leading and shaping their life during these times.

Dwelling in the Word (Acts 16) The Guiding Team listened together to this text in Acts 16 each time they got together. The team reflected on the flexibility it took for the biblical characters in this passage to keep changing directions and plans as God led the group in different ways. They talked a lot about how the group would have known that "the Spirit of Jesus prevented them" from doing ministry. What did that look like? How did they know it was God stopping them and not something else? What were their discussions like about those decisions? One person suggested that maybe some of the ministry challenges the parish had faced recently were an effort by God to redirect their energy into a different direction. One clear take-away from dwelling on the content of this text was the need to be adaptable and attentive to God's leading when trying to do ministry in new places and in new ways.

The Guiding Team also invited the council to engage in dwelling in the word at their meetings over these months. The council found this practice energizing. There were very good discussions about both the meaning of the text and the practice of dwelling itself. One member of the council thought that dwelling in the Word at the beginning of their meetings changed the way they engaged the other items on the agenda.

Through this practice of dwelling in the Word, the Guiding Team began to recognize how they are used to a clergy person explaining the text to them rather than interpreting it themselves. This was a bit scary at times for them. They wondered about whether or not they were reading something into the text that wasn't there. They wondered about how they could honor all the different perspectives people brought to the reading. But in general, they appreciated the chance to hear everyone's voice when thinking about this passage.

Listening to the Neighborhood (God Sightings)

The idea of taking pictures of ways people saw God at work in their "neighborhood" was challenging. The team wanted to be sure they respected the privacy of others. On top of that, it was hard to know what should count as something that showed God's presence and what shouldn't. The team ended up taking a few pictures of places and people in the neighborhood around their parish building that they hadn't paid much attention to before. The exercise caused them to walk into a few businesses near the parish they hadn't engaged in before. They met the owners of a corner store and learned a bit about their background. They took a picture of a farmers' market as an example of God's provision in their neighborhood. Even though the team felt like they already knew their neighborhood pretty well, they realized there were some things they hadn't been aware of. There were some new people in the area that they hadn't interacted with. Overall, they realized that by paying attention differently to their surroundings, they noticed quite a few examples of people and places where God was clearly present that they wouldn't have otherwise noticed.

Case Study: Pretend Lutheran Church

Next Steps: Moving Toward Action Learning

So what should this team do next? Imagine that you are coaching this team and they are going to try and follow up on some of what they learned by using action learning.

1. Start by going through each section of this description and noting places where you think the team might want to focus their attention in order to learn more about what God might be teaching them.
 - a. In the “Listening to Others” section, what is something the team learned or noticed that they might want to spend more time learning about over the next few months?
 - b. In the “Dwelling in the Word” section, what is something the team learned or noticed that they might want to spend more time learning about over the next few months?
 - c. In the “Listening to the Neighborhood” section, what is something the team learned or noticed that they might want to spend more time learning about over the next few months?
2. Do you have any initial thoughts about actions the team might take to follow up on any of these insights that came from their listening work?
 - a. What is something the team could *do*, and invite the parish to do with them, that would deepen their learning about something they noticed through the interviews they did?
 - b. What is something the team could *do*, and invite the parish to do with them, that would deepen their learning about something they noticed through the dwelling they did?
 - c. What is something the team could *do*, and invite the parish to do with them, that would deepen their learning about something they noticed through the listening to the neighborhood they did?

It's ok if it is hard to come up with actions they could take, this is just a first pass at this work!

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 hang out
- 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?

ACTION LEARNING EXPERIMENT ASSIGNMENT OPTIONS

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 7th)
 - 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

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 there 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 over the summer. Get permission to set up a table, offer to pay for people's laundry and also pray for them.

Experiment Design Worksheet

1. Name what you want to learn (learning objective). How is this based on your listening work?
2. Describe the steps you will take in the experiment.
3. Create a feedback loop.

Planning Next Steps – Your Assignment

Your Assignment: Learn by Doing (Dates _____)

Gather

Plan for your Guiding Team to get together 4-5 times between now and our next training on **October 6th, 2019**. Plan at least one meeting each month.

Continue to Dwell in the Word

Plan to listen to Acts 16:6-15 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.

Try an Action Learning Experiment (or two)

Decide on what experiment or experiments your Guiding Team would like to invite the congregation into trying over the next several months. Begin by reviewing what you learned from the listening work you did in-between the first two trainings. Identify a few areas where you think God might be inviting you to do some more learning.

Choose an experiment given as an example at the training or design one of your own. Make sure your learning objective, steps, and feedback look are clear.

Choose something that other people in the congregation would be able to try over the course of the next three months. Create a communication and invitation plan for how you will invite other people in the congregation into these experiments in-between trainings.

Make a plan for recording what you learn as you start engaging in these experiments. You'll be invited to share what you learned at our next training.

KEY QUESTIONS:

WHAT MIGHT GOD BE UP TO?

HOW CAN WE JOIN IN?

Next Training Date: OCTOBER 6th, 2:00-6:00 PM