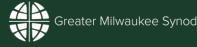




Adventures in Renewal

Listen. Learn. Be Transformed.



Pretend Lutheran Church

A case study to practice mining learning from experiments

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.



Pretend Lutheran Church

A case study to practice mining learning from experiments

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.



Pretend Lutheran Church

A case study to practice mining learning from experiments

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!