



Adventures in Renewal
Listen. Learn. Be Transformed.



Action-Learning Experiment Example

Participating in a Community Meal

Learning Objective

We want to learn what God is doing at the Ozaukee Food Alliance's Saturday lunches, and in the lives of the people who come.

Why do we want to learn this?

In our listening work, we noticed that most people spoke of the need for places of social connection, and named those connections as their key source of hope. We then asked ourselves, "where are other places of social connection outside of the church, and how we can learn what God is up to in those spaces?"

What steps are we going to take?

Preparation:

1. Matt will reach out to the director of the program to coordinate the day.
2. Al will connect with the teacher's union (the people providing the food that day) to learn about who they are and why they do it (& to explain who we are and that we are willing to make a contribution).
3. We will each recruit one additional person from our churches to participate with us, and we will share with them this one-page summary.

On the day of the event:

4. We will arrive at 10:45 AM to offer an orientation to any who have not been a part of the EPIC Listening Team prior to this event. All will have been given this page prior to the event and will have spent time reviewing it, complete with our "learnings log" on the opposite side.
5. During this orientation, Tom will help us practice the art of the "non-creepy follow-up question." :)
6. Before we go into the meal space, we will pray together that God will make us good listeners, and open our eyes and ears so we can see what God is up to in the lives of the people who come.

When at the meal:

7. Ask permission if it is OK to sit down
8. If there are too many of us and not enough other patrons, some of us will choose to sit on the end or at a separate table so we don't end up with five of us and one other patron at a table. Those who have to do this will simply then ask good follow-up questions in our debriefing time later.
9. We will find ways to open conversation with "What brings you here?"
 - i. Consider what follow up questions might make sense.
 - ii. The goal is to listen more than we speak.
 - iii. Listen for (or directly ask): Where else are there places for people to connect like this?

Remember: "When you show interest in others...people LOVE to share about their life & passions."

10. If asked why you are here, respond by saying you heard there is a good sense of community here and you are interested in getting to know folks. (Or reword this to make it your own)

What is our feedback loop?

11. We will debrief on-site from 1:00-2:00 PM, using these questions (Please review ahead of time)
 - What are we noticing? (notice who is there, where people sit, how long they stay, etc.)
 - What questions are coming to our minds? (We don't have to answer them; just name them)
 - What might God be doing in this place, and in the lives of the people we met today?

Example of a Learnings Log

For the past six months, the Listening Team has been listening to God, our neighbors, and our circles of friends, attempting to hear where God is moving in spaces outside the church, so we can join in with what God is doing and experience together a sense of revitalized mission and energy for ministry.

We began by asking, "What gives you hope?" during a local street festival, and continued to listen to both community members and congregational members. A surprise learning was that while some church folks were hesitant to answer this question, community members were eager to share, and grateful to be heard.

We then listened to friends and family through "mustard seed field reports," and the feedback we received from all of the above has led us to these learnings so far:

Learnings Log (Key Learnings bolded & underlined):

- i. Family is a key bond & central place where people are experiencing joy
- ii. Many of us have kids/grandkids in the community; **How might we lean into this?**
- iii. The question was asked, "**How might we listen to and love people without any hooks?**"
- iv. People love being listened to! The community was NOT hesitant about answering (but some church folks were...)
- v. It was important that we asked a question that **directly applied to everyday life without "church-ese"**
- vi. **The importance of "found family" is growing in the broader culture.**
With the Surgeon General's naming of an "epidemic of loneliness," this is a place we can enter.
- vii. This phrase rose to the top in our September 2023 conversation: "Be real. Be you. Be loved."
How might we keep sending this message to the community together in a way that helps us practice being church together and listening to those outside the church in a way that shows we are curious about their lives (not just curious about how to get them into our churches)?
- viii. Through this joint work, our definition of church family is broadening! (Joint events well attended)
Relationships & trust are growing, which leads to more energy for ministry!
Working together produces energy for ministry & mission.
- ix. It's ok to be uncomfortable...this is what happens when you are on a journey! (Remember Acts 16)
- x. **"Clearly everything we are hearing from folks speaks to the power of connection. Where is God connecting people, even outside our churches, and how can we join in with what God is already up to in those spaces?"**
- xi. **"When you show interest in others...people LOVE to share about their life & passions" HUGE**
- xii. "Often all it takes is showing interest in them...it meant the world to people..."
- xiii. "How might we engage with conversations with people outside our churches, asking them what forms of support would be helpful? And ask it in a way that they are centered, not us & the needs of the church?"
- xiv. **"How might we learn more about where people find a sense of belonging and enter those spaces, building relationships?"**
- xv. One member shared what he's learned in two conversations with younger folks at his congregation:
 - Those with children want to go to places where kids go & be with other families with children
 - There's not much for families with little kids, outside school & sports
 - They were interested in something where they wouldn't have to cook :)
- xvi. "Blessing people where they are is more important than getting them to show up to where you are"

Key Questions For Every Step

- i. Who are the "Lydias" or "people of peace"?
- ii. Where are the spaces "outside the city gate" (outside assumed religious spaces) where folks are already gathering in their daily lives?
- iii. How do we enter those spaces in a spirit of listening & learning?