
CONNECTING

RESOURCE

KIT

For use with:

Connecting
A Leader's Guide for Congregational Reflection
using the U.S. Congregational Life Survey

and

Your Congregation's 8-Page Connections Report

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ISAIAH 43:16-19

Thus says God,
Who made a way through the sea,
A path in the great waters;
Who put chariots and horse in the field
And a powerful army,
Which lay there never to rise again,
Snuffed out, put out like a wick:

No need to recall the past,
No need to think about what was done before.
See, I am doing a new deed,
Even now it comes to light; can you not see it?
Yes, I am making a road in the wilderness,
Paths in the wild.

II CORINTHIANS 5:17

Everyone in Christ becomes a new person altogether –
The past is finished and gone,
Everything becomes fresh and new.

A Litany For The Once And Future Church

Let us pray.

O God, you call us to be more than we have been. You beckon us to leadership in a time of institutional civil war and in a place where personal stress camouflages our common sense of your real presence. Yet you come to us in every moment and space. Your Spirit calls to our deep places as we manufacture goals and objectives. You urge us on to discern your vision for us. Your Son meets us at every street corner and county intersection with a call to ministry.

From frantic effort and other symptoms of personal burnout and organizational fibrillation,
O GOD, DELIVER US.

From desperately holding steady, hoping for the best, and other forms of denial,
O GOD, DELIVER US.

From bad habits born in lazy assumptions about structural resistance and inadequate leadership,
O GOD, DELIVER US. MAKE US RESOLUTE MIDWIVES OF YOUR REIGN.

For the ambiguity of current religious establishments,
WE THANK YOU, O GOD.

For bringing the mission frontier to our front door,
WE THANK YOU, O GOD.

For the anxiety of “professional” ministers with radically changing roles,
WE THANK YOU, O GOD.

For the overwhelming reality of differences and diversity,
WE THANK YOU, O GOD.

For risky lay people who know they are in “full-time” Christian service,
WE THANK YOU, O GOD. MAKE US RESOLUTE MIDWIVES OF YOUR REIGN.

As we discern our discontinuity with our culture,
O GOD, HELP US.

As we look through new windows of mission possibility,
O GOD, HELP US.

As we experience collisions of lifestyles in our families and communities,
O GOD, HELP US. MAKE US RESOLUTE MIDWIVES OF YOUR REIGN.

O God, shape our congregation into a training and development center, a laboratory for the work of your New Creation, and a retreat center for the hurt, abused, and confused. Conduct our singing of your new song of wholeness, refreshment, and rest. Bring forth, O God, the church you want, not the church we expect.

AMEN.

Based on *The Once and Future Church*, Loren Mead (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1991)

Prayers For A Colony Of Heaven Laboratory People

Let us pray. O God, we stammer and stumble toward a reality we cannot grasp. This we know: You grasp us as our words fail.

WE ITCH FOR PROOF AND CRAVE TO BE RIGHT. WE MAKE A GREAT DIVIDE BETWEEN THOSE WHO SEE IT OUR WAY AND THOSE WHO ARE “WRONG.”

We live here and now. At the same time we are conscious of our strange alien status.

IN THE MEANTIME, WHICH IS YOUR TIME, YOU WANT US TO BE YOUR CHURCH, A TRAINING LABORATORY, WHERE BEING RIGHT IS NOT AS IMPORTANT AS ACKNOWLEDGING “WHAT IS.”

Liberate us from the bottom-line concerns of the world.

FREE US SO THAT WE MAY TAKE THE CHURCH ENTERPRISE LIGHTLY IN THE SERVICE OF WHAT CONCERNS US ULTIMATELY.

In Jesus You ask the simple question: “How are we living here?”

HELP US TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE COMPLEXITIES OF LIFE. TEACH US TO ASK QUESTIONS WITHOUT ANSWERS. DELIVER US FROM CAREFULLY PREPARED PROMOTIONAL MESSAGES. GRANT US THE ABILITY TO DEBATE FAIRLY.

We are a bunch of “fixers,” O God. We live in a land of abundance and privilege.

HELP US TO RELINQUISH CONTROL. OPEN US TO NOTE THE DIVERSITY OF YOUR “FAMILY.” GRANT US A SENSE OF HUMOR ABOUT ALL EXPERTS.

As colonists in exile, we seek to understand our families of origin and your family of destination.

TRANSFORM US INTO YOUR CHURCH WHERE LOVE AND TRUTH FLASH TOGETHER.

Based on *Growing in Authority, Relinquishing Control*, Celia Hahn (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1994)

Basic Assumptions About A Congregational Study

1. Perception is reality. The church—a human organization—understands itself to be established by God as “the people of God,” “the body of Christ,” and “a priesthood of believers.” These theological concepts make the church different from a not-for-profit organization.
2. A fundamental feature of ecclesiology is that God puts a congregation in its particular community so that the congregation can minister to the surrounding community as well as to the world. Perceptions of that community and of “outsiders,” as well as perceptions of peripheral members on the margins of the church, are as valuable as the perceptions of active leaders in discovering ministry and mission.
3. Congregational reflection on mission, purpose and planning should regularly (at least every three years) involve the entire congregation. Strategic planning has some relevance. The governing board must own the study process, ask for congregational support, and pay attention to the results of the study. The study should be a public process in which the congregation is kept informed and is able to see the results of its perceptions.
4. During a congregational study the language of perception – how people see what “is” – is more important than “should/ought” language. Disagreement, divergence of perception, and diversity of opinion are valuable and to be pursued. Premature consensus and unanimity are major deterrents to wider ownership of ministry.

Congregational Study Norms

We will:

- ___ Pray—for each other, for the task group, for the congregation.

- ___ Practice active listening to one another, not interrupting or operating from a “yes, but . . .” stance.

- ___ Keep confidences and refrain from making “they said” or “the congregation thinks” statements.

- ___ Let others have “equal air time” so everyone can participate.

- ___ Affirm and explore differing perspectives, believing that vital congregations thrive on diversity.

CONNECTING Worksheet I Congregation and Community

Check the biblical images that you think about when you think about *the church universal*:

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> God's chosen race | <input type="checkbox"/> A kingdom of priests | <input type="checkbox"/> God's holy nation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> God's personal possession | <input type="checkbox"/> The body of Christ | <input type="checkbox"/> A mystical sweet communion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> People receiving God's pity | <input type="checkbox"/> The people of God | <input type="checkbox"/> Strangers and nomads |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other images: | | |

Check the contemporary images of congregations that apply to *your congregation*:

- | | | |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Library and Academy | <input type="checkbox"/> Clinic | <input type="checkbox"/> Park Bench |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Experimental Laboratory | <input type="checkbox"/> Athletic Club | <input type="checkbox"/> Gourmet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Erotically Capacious Household | <input type="checkbox"/> Music Hall | <input type="checkbox"/> Boot Camp |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Museum | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other images: | | |

An example:

Spiritusoarus Presbyterian Church

- Singing
- Politically Correct
- Yin/Yang
- Traditional
- Family
- Community
- Protestant
- Evangelical-Free
- Program Buffet
- Weekend Haven
- On the hill
- Come Join Us***

Image your congregation as you see it (describe your church):

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Describe the community surrounding your congregation (within a three-mile radius):

<u>Geography</u>	<u>Population(s)</u>	<u>Key Issues</u>	<u>Other Features</u>
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In your small group, develop two lists (noting diverse opinions and opposite perceptions when applicable):

Congregation

Community

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Worksheet II
Seeking and Celebrating God

Discuss Psalm 139 (handout) in your small group.

How Psalm 139 applies to me

How Psalm 139 applies to our congregation

Watch the video section “Building Spiritual Connections.”

Review the two pages on “Building Spiritual Connections” in your congregation’s Connections Report. List your findings and perceptions in your small group in terms of “*What Does the Report Say?*”

Findings

Arrange the group’s list into strengths and weaknesses (note differences of perception and opinion when applicable).

Strength

Weakness

In your small group, develop a list of “*what we need to grow in faith in our congregation*” statements. Select a group member with a strong voice to read the list to the larger group.

What we need to grow in faith in our congregation

In the larger group, note the similarities and differences among the “what we need statements” from the various small groups

Similarities

Differences

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Worksheet III
Inside/Outside Connections

Review parts two and three (pp. 3-6, Building Inside Connections and Building Outside Connections) of your congregation's Connections Report. List your findings:

Inside Connections

Outside Connections

Watch the video sections on “Building Inside Connections” and “Building Outside Connections.”

Read and discuss the passage from Romans 12 (handout) in your small group. Address the question: “What can we deduce about the ‘world’ Paul’s congregations were living in from this passage?”

Paul’s World

In your small group, develop two lists from your individual “findings” lists. Enjoy your diversity and differences of perception.

Inside Connections Findings

Outside Connections Findings

Choose a reader to read your findings to the larger group. Note similarities and differences among the small groups’ findings.

Similar Perceptions

Divergent Perceptions

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Worksheet IV
Current Snapshots and Future Vision

Read the Isaiah and II Corinthians passages (handout) and in your small group list how *letting go of the past* and *welcoming fresh new things* apply to your congregation.

Letting Go of the Past

Welcoming Fresh New Things

Review part four (pp. 7-8) on Building Identity Connections in your congregation's Connections Report, and watch the video presentation on the material. Using the handout on "a typical worshiper" in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey, make a list in your small group of your perceptions of "Who is a typical member of our congregation?"

Typical Members in Our Congregation

Write down a sentence or phrase for each of these categories:

Greatest Need Of Our Congregation

Greatest Need Of Our Community

In your small group, develop a list of "greatest needs of the congregation" and "greatest needs of the community" from your individual responses, noting similarities and differences.

Greatest Need Of Our Congregation

Greatest Need Of Our Community

Use the handout "Personal Vision Statement for My Church" to create your vision statement for your congregation, using language an "outsider" would understand. Read your statement to your small group.

Write down and share with your small group your response to this question: "What is our congregation's single most important issue?"

A Typical Worshiper Is . . .

- Female
- 50 years old
- Employed
- Well educated
- Married
- White

1. Does this describe the typical worshiper in our congregation?
2. Who is left out of this profile of a typical worshiper?
3. Who is in our community or parish but not participating in our services or activities?
4. What one or two steps could our congregation take to invite, welcome, and include new people?

From *A Field Guide to U. S. Congregations*, Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002)

Who is a typical member of our congregation?

*Yahweh, you search me and know me.
You know if I am standing or sitting
You perceive my thoughts from far away.
Whether I walk or lie down, you are watching;
you are familiar with all my ways.*

*Where could I go to escape your spirit?
Where could I flee from your presence?
If I climb to the heavens, you are there;
there, too, if I sink to Sheol.*

*You created my inmost being and knit me together in my mother's womb.
For all these mysteries –
for the wonder of myself, for the wonder of your works –
I thank you.*

From Psalm 139, *Psalms Anew*, Nancy Shreck and Maureen Leach (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1986)

*Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;
love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.
Do not lag zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.
Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.
Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.
Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.
Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.
Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly;
do not claim to be wiser than you are.
Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.
If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all . . .
. . . if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink . . .
. . . Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.*

From Romans 12, *NRSV*