



Engaging Your Community:

A Guide to Seeing All the People

Junius B. Dotson



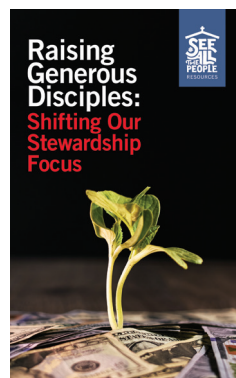
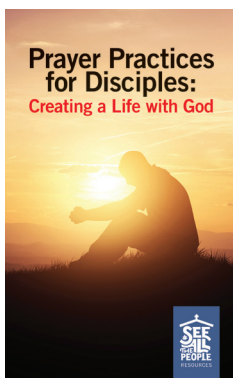
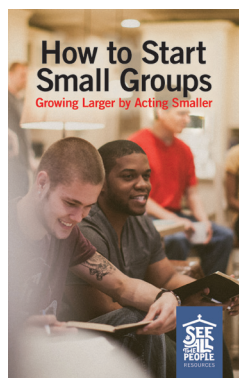
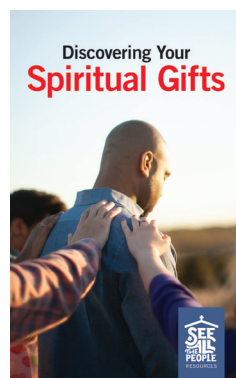
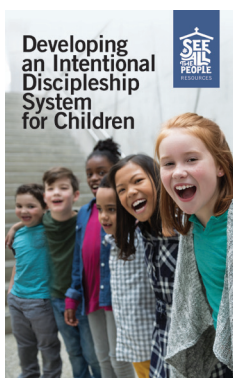
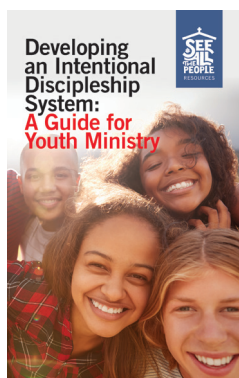
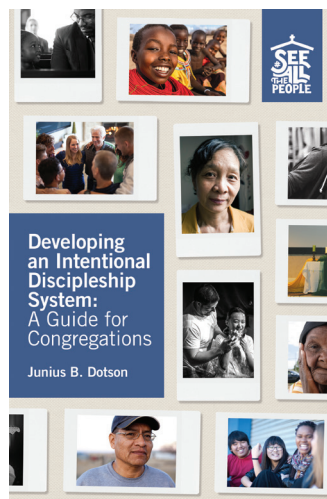
#SEEALLTHEPEOPLE

RESOURCES

Engaging Your Community is the second of two important resources for your church, district, or conference.

We encourage you to also obtain *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations* available at annual conference gatherings and at **SeeAllThePeople.org**. (*Developing an Intentional Discipleship System* has now been translated into Spanish, Korean, and Finnish.)

Other supporting booklets for this initiative are:



(*How to Start Small Groups: Growing Larger by Acting Smaller* and *Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts* are also available in Spanish.)

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Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

— MATTHEW 9:35-38

Introduction

The harvest is still plentiful, and the laborers are still few. Today, not unlike the time of Jesus, people still have deep spiritual needs and long for greater meaning for their lives. Some, as in Matthew’s text, feel harassed and helpless. Some are searching for good news. Some need healing. Jesus still looks out over our cities and villages and has compassion for all of the people ... and so should we as his disciples.

I remember the nursery rhyme taught to us in Sunday school when we were young ...

***Here's the church; here's the steeple,
open the doors and see all the people.***

Unfortunately, many churches today might rewrite that rhyme, “open the doors; where are all the people?” Although there are a few examples of towns and cities where jobs and people have left entirely, an overwhelming majority of cities and towns still report growth in population year after year. The problem is not a lack of people. The problem is our inability to see and reach them. We have forgotten why as disciples we are called to reach out in the first place.

*The problem
is not a lack
of people.*

*The problem
is our inability
to see and
reach them.*



The Heart of a Movement

In Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's book *Citadelle* he describes the process of a group of people building a boat:

One will weave the canvas; another will fell a tree by the light of his ax. Yet another will forge nails, and there will be others who observe the stars to learn how to navigate. And yet all will be as one. Building a boat isn't about weaving canvas, forging nails, or reading the sky. It's about giving a shared taste for the sea, by the light of which you will see nothing contradictory but rather a community of love.

This quote has been paraphrased over the years in several different ways. The one I like the most is this:

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men and women to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.

My grandmother described this yearning as having a burden for the people. She passionately believed in Jesus until her death at ninety-

nine years of age. She served in many positions of leadership inside the church and never quit believing that the love of Christ could transform lives and communities. A school teacher in the Houston Independent School District, my grandmother served as my first superintendent of Vacation Bible School when I was a child. Every year she would fire the children up to share what we were learning with our friends. She taught us to pray always for those who “were yet to come.”

When we talk about engaging our communities, we must make sure that our people find and embrace a vision rooted in a deep love for all of God’s people—not unlike a love and yearning for a vast and endless sea. Such a love pulls us forward, giving us the courage and the willingness to go wherever God leads.

As John Wesley wrote in the 1743 tract, “The Character of a Methodist”:

And while he thus always exercises his love to God, by praying without ceasing, rejoicing evermore, and in everything giving thanks, this commandment is written in his heart, “That he who loveth God, love his brother also.” And he accordingly loves his neighbor as himself; he loves every man in his own soul. His heart is full of love to all mankind, to every child of “the Father of the spirits of all flesh.” That man is not personally known to him, is no bar to his love; no, nor that he is known to be such as he approves not, that he repays hatred for his good-will. For he “loves his enemies”; yea, and the enemies of God, “the evil and the unthankful.” And if it be not in his power to “do good to them that hate him,” yet he ceases not to pray for them, though they continue to spurn his love, and still “despitefully use him and persecute him.”

Do we have a heart for all God’s people—even the people not personally known to us? even the people who reject God or reject us? even our enemies?

Engaging our communities begins here.

Planting churches or extending our church's reach into our communities begins here.

Transforming our communities and our world begins here.

***For God
so loves
the world...
and so
should we.***

It begins with a deep and authentic love for every child of the God of *the spirits of all flesh*.

For God so *loves* the world ... and so should we.

I hope you are picking up this book after having read and begun to apply the teachings from *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations*. Every intentional discipleship system or pathway should include a long and prayerful discussion about those in our community who are not yet here. Every church should endeavor to create intentional spaces, which I refer to as *Big Front Porches* (*Developing an Intentional Discipleship System*, 34), where the nonreligious and nominally religious, or even those who have rejected the church, might find room to search and explore spirituality and Christianity. Places where disciples, who are themselves on journeys of spiritual growth and maturity, might be present and aware of God's prevenient grace moving in their lives and the lives of others. Creating intentional discipleship systems ensures that disciples continue to grow and mature, becoming more like Christ. If this is happening in places of ministry, a genuine love for all God's people soon follows.

It is in this spirit that we offer a call to intentional discipleship, with the desire to bring clarity to the church's mission of making disciples, offering healthy principles for intentional discipleship, and rekindling passion for our mission. Such intentional discipleship will always move us outside ourselves and into a desire and a vision for engaging our communities in real, meaningful, and transformational ways. And when we are faithful to follow where God leads, we will be transformed.

I pray that churches will have a relentless focus on making disciples and engaging their communities. As we operate and act in the spirit of movement, a spark of passion and a burden to reach a new generation of believers will spread across the connection.

I hope you will use this book with your leaders as a guide to rediscovering a love for all God's children and for learning some practical ways that you can begin to love and engage your community.

May your love for your community become as deep and wide as God's love for us. May it be just like discovering a love and yearning for a vast and endless sea.

You are invited to join the movement as together we

#SEE ALL THE PEOPLE

... making disciples who transform the world.

Take a Moment

1. Read again Wesley's "The Character of a Methodist" quote on page 7: Are we called to love every child of the God of the spirits of all flesh? What does that mean to you?
2. What are the barriers that keep us from a deep love for all people?
3. What are some first steps toward overcoming those barriers?

Then turning to the disciples, Jesus said to them privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!”

– LUKE 10:23

See All the People

An award-winning 2002 Saturn commercial opens with a man jogging backward out of his garage. He pauses at the foot of the driveway as if making a three-point turn and runs forward down the street. Deliberate but playful piano accompaniment begins, with scenes of people lined up in pairs and alone at stoplights. Meanwhile, others also in pairs and alone, simultaneously jog through the intersection with the green light. One man runs past a line of stationary people at a stoplight, pauses slightly and runs around a corner. In the following scene, people stand in spaces deemed for parking. Next comes a dusk setting with humans carrying flashlights at their waists, jogging toward the camera simulating headlights, while others run away from the camera carrying pairs of red lights, mimicking brake lights. A beat later, a man stands on an expressway, facing forward, as a police officer, several feet behind him, writes a ticket. Next, people creep forward in what resembles heavy traffic. They meet at a four-way stop, as one person waves another man through. One man jogs with a gaggle of children plodding behind him, simulating a school bus. With the camera view climbing, people move along a spiraling highway interchange.

***“When we
design our
cars, we
don’t see
sheet metal.
We see the
people who
may one day
drive them.”***

At no point in the commercial has a single car or piece of metal appeared—only people in the place of cars. Then an omnipotent voice declares, “When we design our cars, we don’t see sheet metal. We see the people who may one day drive them.”

This Saturn commercial rocks the advertising world. It earns the San Francisco-based ad agency a prestigious Gold Lion Award at the International Advertising Festival in Cannes, France. Considered one of the ten best commercials of the last 25 years, it encapsulates an ageless wisdom about how institutions need to view the people they serve.

People aren’t products, profits, or goals.
They aren’t simply the means to an end; they
represent the total focus in what we do.

People are the means. People are the end.
People are the middle in all that we do.

Successful institutions understand that
people are not “the how,” as in *how* we
reach our goals, but they are “the why” of
our involvement in the first place.

***People aren't
products, profits,
or goals. They
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total focus in
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To varying degrees, churches have moved away from this paradigm and, in a noble attempt to save the church as an institution, have lost sight of the very people we are called to reach. One unintended consequence of the church growth movement of the past twenty-five years is that people simply became numbers on a report. In too many cases, strategic plans focused on filling the sanctuary with the goal of becoming the next nationally known megachurch.

As membership and attendance have waned over the past four decades, the response from an anxious church has been to try and fix churches, to create the next new “can’t miss” program to spur a new wave of growth, to sprinkle into worship services a dash of contemporary culture, to create wider doorways to accommodate new and returning disciples. But with few exceptions, worshipers have not returned and churches have suffered as a consequence.

The Source of Our Anxiety

According to a 2015 article at churchleaders.com by Kelly Shattuck, fewer than 20 percent of Americans regularly attend church. By 2050, the percentage of the US population regularly attending church will be almost half of what it was in 1990. Shattuck quotes noted researcher Thom Rainer's report that "the failure of churches to keep up with the population growth is one of the church's greatest issues heading into the future." Rainer states that only 6 percent of churches are growing—defining "growing" as not only an increase in attendance but also increasing at a pace faster than its community's population growth rate. Stated inversely, 94 percent of our churches are losing ground in the communities they serve.

A chronically anxious system tends to lose all perspective, resulting in a "let's just fix it" or "let's try harder" mode of thinking and operating. During these past four decades of decline we have busily tried to reinvent the very idea of church, seeking a programmatic defibrillator to shock life back into the heart of the church.

United Methodist church leaders considered its 82-page *Towers Watson Report* (2010) a blueprint not only for church growth but also for church rebirth. The report conducted church member surveys and, based on the responses, calculated a "vitality index." Report authors believed that four "drivers" would create congregational vitality: Small Groups and Programs, Lay Leadership, Worship Services, and Pastoral Leadership. The report's release triggered a call to action.

Leaders across our denomination developed a plan to implement these "drivers" of vitality. We created metrics for the number of small groups in a given local church. We measured laity efficacy by the numbers involved in specific programs. We tinkered with worship services to ensure a mix of traditional and contemporary. Pastors would exhibit good leadership by creating and managing a welcoming environment. If the church implemented these drivers or infrastructure, according to the report, people would fill the pews. Growth did occur, but it was short-term and fell well short of hopes and expectations.

Stop Fixing Churches

The truth churches and leaders must embrace centers on the idea that the report's "drivers" served as indicators of health. They do not *create* health; they merely reflect health. I believe vital congregations are healthy not because they have discovered some secret sauce but because they have never lost sight of the primary task of making disciples.

We have to stop fixing churches.

We can't tinker our way to vitality.

There's no quick fix.

We didn't fall into these problems overnight, and we won't climb out of them by tomorrow.

Churches have deep and complex problems that developed over decades. They are our most conservative institutions and, as such, they are the least likely to change to keep up with the constantly changing society they serve.

The only way back to vitality comes through the deep and adaptive work we seem to want to avoid—a concerted and intimate reengagement of the communities we serve. We have to see all the people God has called us to reach, and this becomes the foundation of effective ministry.

When significant people in your life pull away from you, do you send a greeting card or do you visit in person? Do you create a PowerPoint presentation with charts and graphs that make the case for their not pulling away, or do you hug them and find ways to stay connected? The church has been sending postcards and producing PowerPoint presentations when we need to immerse ourselves in the lives of the people who are right outside our doors. We have to seek meaningful relationships in authentic, organic, and consistent ways.

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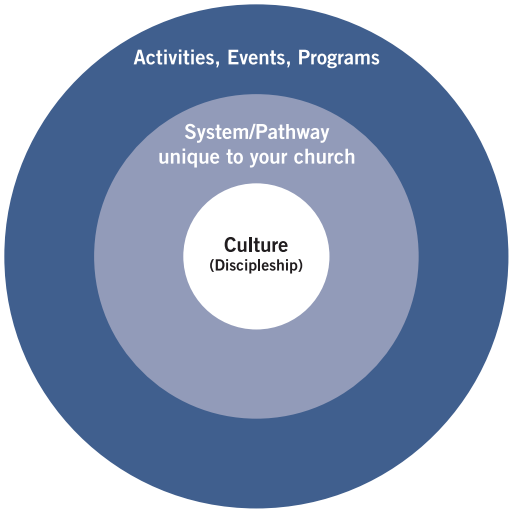
If sharing the love and grace of God with people becomes our “why,” then relationships with those people becomes our “how.” We cannot get to our “why” through surface and programmatic interaction. The kind of intimacy required is more personal and ultimately more effective but infinitely more difficult. It requires much more of us. It is messy and complicated. It will frustrate those of us needing and expecting fast results. This crucial work requires reservoirs of spiritual stamina, which is probably why we have avoided it for so long.

The pressure and anxiety about attendance declines are real and frightening to anyone interested in the sustainability of our institution. The reflexive desire to start making church adjustments seems logical. A slow hemorrhage of membership and attendance seems to lend itself to simply caulking cracks in the foundation. However, this hemorrhage has happened over decades. But all is not lost.

Countering long-term trends demands a long-term strategy—an approach that involves much more than shortening services or adding a soft-rock guitar to worship music. The prescription for progress entails processes much more organic and authentic than flawless programming: It involves something akin to entrepreneurial freedom rather than denominational restraint, agility rather than staid and institutional dependence. This path better aligns with The United Methodist Church’s creed of passion over organizational neatness.

The Culture Is the Strategy

There comes a point at which institutions simply cannot be fixed without a massive culture change. For churches, this means an unyielding focus on making disciples who make disciples. Church members invest most of their church time in the activities, events, and programs that keep ministry going from week to week. However, many leaders have lost sight of why these activities, events, and programs exist in the first place. It happens in every church. It happens when the business of *doing* ministry becomes the ministry. It happens when our activities become more important than our spiritual growth and development and become more valued than engaging people in our everyday life experiences.



POSTURE OF BEING THE CHURCH	
DYING CHURCH	VITAL CHURCH
Coming to church	Going to people
Sitting in church	Engaging with people
Leaving the church	Connecting with people

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Making sure our church culture becomes focused on discipleship will help us return to our “why.” Our “why”—just like the Saturn commercial—is people; our “why” involves making disciples of Jesus Christ. A strong connection to our “why” adds more power and impact to our activities, events, and programs. The opposite is also true: When we focus *only* on activities, events, and programs, we lose our focus on the goal of making disciples.

Discipleship Culture is the DNA of the congregation. In essence, it is the intentional system of discipleship. The way a church connects to people (building relationships), invites and welcomes them into the faith community, teaches them about Jesus Christ and the message of grace and salvation, invites them to pray and worship, sends them into the community to engage in acts of compassion and justice, and equips them to see and engage people in the community (back to building relationships) defines the way it does discipleship.

If we are serious about changing the culture in our churches, we need to get serious about discipleship. We need to get serious about seeing and reaching people. Just as Saturn saw people instead of sheet metal, we have to see through the pews and walls of the church and focus on the people we are called to reach. And we cannot reach people without first being in relationship. Discipleship begins with relationship. We must grow the capacity of existing members to

develop and grow relationships with people who are currently outside the church.

Imagine what it would look like to begin to see people who are not currently a part of our church, the people outside our doors, the people across the street and throughout our communities. What would it look like if we focused on developing meaningful relationships and bringing Jesus into the center of our lives in all that we do? This can happen in our day. If we begin with discipleship, we can usher in a new beginning. We see a similar example through Jesus, who did not call a building his church but rather made Peter, a human being, the foundation of the church. If Saturn can follow Christ's example, surely those who proclaim him as Lord and Savior can as well.

Take a Moment

1. With your leaders, name some of your anxieties as they relate to your church.
2. How have you been trying to “fix” your church? Explain.
3. What would it look like to let intentional discipleship and relationship building be at the center of all that you do?
4. How would you describe the current culture of your church or ministry?
5. What needs to change in order to move toward a discipleship culture?

*If we are
serious about
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discipleship.*

The most important thing is that I complete my mission, the work that the Lord Jesus gave me—to tell people the Good News about God’s grace.

— ACTS 20:24, NCV

Work Avoidance vs. Work Engagement

Work Avoidance

Each year across our denomination, we devote hundreds of hours to meetings in order to maintain the institution. We spend countless hours in local church meetings focusing on decision-making that, if we are honest, have little impact on making disciples or engaging our communities. The difficult truth is that we find it easier to spend time in these contexts than to begin the hard work of engaging people outside the walls of the church. During such meetings we often feel good about winning a point and we go home believing we have accomplished ministry. In reality we have only accomplished work avoidance.

Work avoidance is the sum of the unproductive activities we engage in that take the place of more important tasks before us. Work avoidance tends to be technical, meaning we can complete the task and move on. Completing these tasks can make us feel productive when we really have done nothing to move us toward our mission of making disciples. The result? Work avoidance can perpetually keep us from our mission.

It is similar to needing to have a serious conversation with someone but choosing instead to make small talk and polite conversation—avoiding the important conversation. And by avoiding the serious conversation, the real issue only worsens.

In our ministries, work avoidance mirrors herself with conservative vision.¹ He (conservative vision) is always a safe and familiar choice. She (work avoidance) stands pat and sticks with tradition. He bellows, “We’ve always done it this way.” She adds cosmetic changes to programming. He tinkers with musical styles in the worship service.

Work avoidance involves light editing and proofreading when a complete rewrite is needed. Much of our outreach is an expression of work avoidance. We create great outreach programs to help our community, often with no intention of actually getting to know the people we claim to help. I believe part of our missional responsibility comes in delivering concrete, practical help to people. However, we need not divorce this help from the task of building relationships and making disciples.

Let me offer an example from one of the churches where I served. Every year the United Methodist Men conducted a neighborhood cleanup. We sent out flyers about the church and the upcoming cleanup. We partnered with the city to offer heavy trash disposal, and on the day of the event, we gathered in teams to remove debris throughout the neighborhood. This

was a successful annual event demonstrating the church’s care for the community and its environment. But one year we realized no one had given thought to how we might meet and engage our neighbors in meaningful conversations during this cleanup. We were missing an opportunity to move from serving our community toward engaging our community. We remedied this by creating a team who did not pick up

Work avoidance involves light editing and proofreading when a complete rewrite is needed.

¹ *Conservative* used here in the sense of a goal set purposely low for the sake of caution (not in the political sense of the word)

trash. Their task was to knock on doors, meet the neighbors, and spend time learning the stories of the people in our community. We improved this event by adding an intentional relationship-building component in order to connect with the people in our community.

Work Engagement

The opposite of work avoidance is WORK ENGAGEMENT. Making a shift from avoidance to engagement, we choose to engage in deep discipleship discussions with our congregations and our leadership. We do this without seeking to assign blame to current or past leaders as to why we haven't been engaging our community. We spend more time discussing efforts to engage people who are currently outside the church—specifically, those who claim no religious affiliation or consider the church to be irrelevant—as part of a larger intentional discipleship system. We choose to engage in this difficult, complex, and adaptive work rather than the interior decorating we often do that passes as ministry today.

I believe these conversations can lead to new ways of imagining ministry. We have been violating a major tenet of evangelism:

We cannot engage in discipleship without relationship.

Too often we are content with practicing arm's length discipleship. We reconcile the work of building our faith and actively engaging the community to one singular being, just as Christ is reconciled with the church. Let us be a people who once again engage with the mission before us, aware of the constant temptation to avoid this important work.

Take a Moment

1. Name at least three work avoidance topics that as leaders you agree to stop talking about (or agree you will spend much less time on).
2. How can we begin our work with the most important conversations? What is a story of transformation or discipleship with which you might begin your next leadership meeting?
3. How might we as leaders model the tenet of evangelism (we cannot engage in discipleship without relationship)? How might it start with the relationships around your leadership table? Name a relationship that each leader might focus on beyond your leadership table. Pray for each.

He [Jesus] left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water...

[missionally engaged, relationship-driven conversation]

Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

— JOHN 4:3-7, 28-29

Missional Engagement & Relationships

I use the word *engagement* in deliberate contrast to our traditional understanding of *outreach*. Let me offer some distinctions. Outreach has traditionally taken two forms: missional or evangelistic. Missional outreach is usually characterized by *helping* ministries such as food and clothing drives, neighborhood cleanups, feeding ministries, and other types of hands-on missions. With this type of outreach, churches discern a need in the community and design a program to meet that need. These outreach programs provide tangible help to the people they serve. Unfortunately, they can sometimes be disconnected from the church's discipleship system. Many churches never make the effort to connect missional outreach with a discipleship opportunity.

Evangelistic outreach efforts are typically exemplified by efforts to invite people to church, such as attending a street festival and handing out invitations to church, passing out water bottles with the church's information on it, or wearing branded T-shirts at a public community gathering. These endeavors raise the visibility of a local church with the hope that people will give their church a try.

Engagement involves initiating and building relationships. Engagement seeks to ensure that outreach and evangelism efforts become a vital part of an intentional system of discipleship. Again, we turn to our “why”: *Discipleship begins with relationship*. The church does not undertake outreach to provide ministry *for people* but rather to be in ministry and relationship *with people*.

Whether your church's outreach is missional or evangelistic in nature, its effectiveness depends upon its being intentionally designed with engagement and relationship-building in mind.

***Engagement
involves
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and building
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Effective missional engagement that forms part of an intentional system of discipleship has the following characteristics: it is authentic, organic, and consistent in its approach to relationships. Let's take a look at each of these.

Authentic

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines *authentic* in this way: “of undisputed origin; genuine.” Our engagement with people must be genuine. It must start from the place of seeing all people as persons created in the image of God. We must have a sincere desire to know people and be committed to being in relationship with our neighbors, even if they do not attend our church. The more authentic and honest the encounter, the more effective we are in initiating a relationship that has the capacity to grow. You have no doubt heard the well-known truism: “People won't care how much you know until they know how much you care.” People want to be known, and they want to know that we care.

Organic

As we engage with others and begin to build relationships, our approach must be organic. Relationships cannot be forced. In the world of community organizing, relationships are given time to take shape and evolve in natural and organic ways. In the local church context, we can provide opportunities to connect with our neighbors in ways that build authentic community. When we commit ourselves to connecting with our neighbors and getting to know them and their stories, there will be natural openings to share our faith. Opportunities to invite them to events or experiences will develop out of the life experiences we share with one another. When we take time to get to know people, invitations develop from our growing knowledge of where they are in their life. These will come because we have fostered life-giving relationships.

Consistent

Any healthy relationship requires a consistent investment of time. Consistent interaction can include a phone call, a personal invitation to a connection event, or a simple acknowledgment that they have been prayed for by your church. It can be a knock on a neighbor's door just to check on him or her. Consistency in relationships takes time, involvement, effort, energy; but it is worth it. In a world in which so much is transactional, people appreciate those who offer love in consistent, nontransactional ways. I am convinced that people in this generation are attracted to Christ; they are not persuaded to Christ. They are not argued into the kingdom, but they are drawn by the love of God when we model and communicate in visibly consistent ways.

I See You

In my travels to Johannesburg, South Africa, I learned a greeting called *sawabona*. It is a greeting used particularly in the northern Natal tribes. It means "I see you" or "we see you." The traditional response is *yebo, sawabona*, which means, "Yes, I see you too." Seeing is a dialogue. It is an invitation to participate in another's life.

“I see you” means I acknowledge the dignity of your existence. This underscores the belief that the person before you is created in the image of God.

It was in the context of seeing the people that Jesus reminds us through prayer of our call to be engaged in our community. The biblical text at the heart of the #SeeAllThePeople movement is Matthew 9:36-38. These verses describe Jesus as seeing the crowds and having compassion for them. Jesus and the disciples witnessed the exact same scene. The disciples saw a large crowd of people. Jesus viewed them with different eyes. Our daily prayer should be that we might see the people the way Jesus sees them.

Engagement includes a corporate and personal dimension of discipleship. The corporate aspect includes everything a church does to foster developing relationships and inviting persons into discipleship opportunities. The personal dimension of discipleship must be an integral part of a church's ethos. This is the investment of developing relationships over time. It will take the commitment of ordinary grassroots believers, specifically our wonderful and gifted laity, who are willing to be the presence of Christ in our neighborhoods to make a discernible difference. It will take a change of culture.

When we see all the people with a desire to be in conversation, ready first to listen deeply to their story, only then will we be in a position to speak into their lives or invite them on a lifelong journey to follow Christ.

Take a Moment

1. Name some outreach efforts from your place of ministry (think missional and evangelistic). How might you make these more engaging? How might you place at the center of each a desire to build relationships?
2. In what ways might you update your outreach/evangelism ministries to be a part of your larger intentional discipleship system or pathway?
3. How might you begin to train disciples who serve in these ministries to be more authentic, organic, and consistent as they build relationships?
4. How can you help disciples become more aware of moments when an invitation might be extended?

*Engagement
seeks to ensure
that outreach
and evangelism
efforts become
a vital part of
an intentional
system of
discipleship.*

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

— MATTHEW 28:18-20

Equipping Disciples Who Lead

Discipleship Is Leadership

Leadership begins with leadership of oneself. How you lead yourself shapes how you lead others. People lead as they experience being led. The future of deeper discipleship lies in equipping and empowering people to find leadership within themselves. This is what made the early Christian movement spread so quickly in the time of Jesus and what made the early Methodist movement so powerful and effective. We need to equip people with the same spirit of servant leadership. We must develop within disciples a capacity to evaluate needs, pull together the right people, and mobilize to do the work. As disciples we are called to be in leadership. As leaders, we are first called to be disciples. Discipleship *is* leadership.

We must move away from the understanding that the pastor is the paid leader in residence. In the early Methodist movement in the United States, clergy on horseback went from town to town offering the gathered Methodist societies Communion, baptism, and oversight/

instruction concerning their discipleship and community engagement, often referred to as spreading scriptural holiness and transformation across the land. The itinerating pastor offered instruction and encouragement to the lay leaders and then got back on his horse to go to the next town, leaving the disciples to continue the work in their context. Discipleship was the ongoing work of the people. Christian leaders of today must inspire and equip the same discipleship-based leadership in others. Leadership starts with and flows out of discipleship.

This is an old idea. The Protestant Reformation established the idea that individual disciples did not need an intermediary priest to commune with God. The Reformation lifted up the biblical principle of the “priesthood of all believers” (see 1 Peter 2:4-6), raising up disciples who exercised leadership over their personal relationship with God, toward a love and engagement with neighbor.

As I reflect on my time in ministry, often the most meaningful moments were in one-on-ones with leaders; scheduled meetings with team leaders at the end of the year to talk about their spiritual growth. These moments of celebration served as poignant reminders that leaders are to model what it means to be a lifelong disciple of Jesus. I also used this time to talk about hoped-for accomplishments in the coming year. The meeting concluded with a ministry map for moving the ministry forward and, even more importantly, with a plan to encourage the spiritual growth of team members.

Leaders who lead from this mindset will discover that when they equip others to exercise leadership, discipleship growth will take place exponentially, almost in the same way a sprinkler system has a main water source but produces multiple sprinkler heads to expand its reach—thereby watering more grass.

We must lead with the end in mind. The essence of leadership is knowing the direction you desire to travel and being able to influence the head, hands, and hearts of others to follow you there. Our goal is to develop leaders for the movement. Leaders who help others discover their pathway to healthy discipleship and grow their

commitment to Jesus unleash unlimited possibilities. I believe this is one of the most effective ways to change the culture of a local church. The result will be growing, healthy congregations filled with people who take their relationship with Jesus seriously and are passionately committed to inviting others to know Jesus in the same way.

Take a Moment

1. How can we better empower our disciples to lead?
2. How might you encourage your leaders in their spiritual growth?
3. What responsibilities must be reclaimed by the laity? And related to this, what responsibilities must clergy relinquish to the laity? What roles and responsibilities must clergy focus on? (This should be a yearly conversation for your leadership with the purpose of bringing clarity to roles and responsibilities, aligning them with the mission of making disciples.)

*The future
of deeper
discipleship lies
in equipping
and empowering
people to find
leadership within
themselves.*

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’”

— LUKE 10:1-9

Equipping Disciples Who Engage

Begin with Reflection

1. How did Jesus send the disciples into the villages? What instructions did he offer?
2. Why “no purse, no bag, no sandals” and “eat what is set before you”? What is the point?
3. What is it about such an encounter that enables the kingdom of God to come near?

How Do We Engage?

The above passage offers excellent insight into how we are to engage our communities as disciples of Jesus. First, Jesus sends the disciples out with nothing. In my opinion, the point of this is vulnerability. Engaging others in ways that build relationships can only be done when we become vulnerable and open to how God's Spirit and grace moves through these encounters. We also must realize and be open to the fact that God might use others to be a blessing or to speak into our lives, and may even meet our deepest needs. We must not come with the idea that *we* are bringing something to *them*. Second, we are to be consistent in our approach—"do not move from house to house." Spend time with the people that we encounter. Another way we could say this is, be fully present.

A Lesson from the European Refugee Crisis

In a video experiment conducted on May 17, 2016, Amnesty Poland, set out to recreate psychologist Arthur Aron's experiment from twenty years prior. In this experiment Aron discovered that four minutes of looking into the eyes of another human being without saying a word would bring the two people closer. Amnesty Poland paired refugees with Europeans to test Aron's conclusion. This video attempted to improve the treatment of refugees by Europeans, connecting them with their common humanity.

Watch the video using this link:

<https://youtu.be/f7XhrXUoD6U>

SUMMARY: Two people are led into a room; their eyes are closed. They are seated in front of each other within arm's length: one, a refugee fleeing a war-torn country; one, a European in a country struggling to respond to the refugee crisis. They open their eyes having been instructed not to speak for four minutes, looking directly at the other person for the duration. Some break the rules immediately, saying, "I like your mustache." "Are you new to Berlin?"

“How old are you?” The exercise appears awkward at first for some, but for others it immediately creates smiles. Some cannot handle the intensity and look away. Some begin to cry. At the end of the exercise, all smile, some stand and embrace, some hold hands. Some make plans to visit a local zoo together. Two children upon finishing the experiment begin to play a game of tag.

Looking into another’s eyes drives us to a surprisingly deep connection. In just four minutes—without words—friendships begin to form. How is that possible? What is it about a simple encounter such as this? Why does this experiment elicit such a powerful response—with just the simple act of *seeing* another and *being seen* by another?

I believe Jesus understood this principle as he sent the disciples out with instructions for vulnerability and consistency—to be fully present in the moment, perhaps even beginning to see people the way Jesus sees people.

At the conclusion of four minutes, in almost every instance, people embrace as if they have known each other for decades. Why? Something happens when we sit with one another without language, looking into each other’s eyes without prejudice. What we see and experience is the purity of another human being—the *imago dei* (image of God). We might say that in the mystery of such an encounter healing can occur. We might even say the kingdom of God draws near or is revealed.

How might we rethink our approach to building relationships and engaging others in light of Jesus’ instructions and by the example of vulnerability seen in this video?

Seeing Others: A Lesson from NPR's Storycorps

“What can happen when you take the time to talk to a stranger?”

Listen to the story here:

www.npr.org/2017/11/03/561642158/an-unlikely-friendship-reignites-2-artists-ambitions

SUMMARY: A thirty-one-year-old car designer named Brian Peterson decided to talk to thirty-eight-year-old Matt Faris, a homeless man whom Brian passed every day on his way to work. One day Brian decided to say hello. He begins by apologizing for having passed Matt and never having said hello. Matt recalls that Brian started the first conversation by asking him lots of questions—questions most people never asked of him, such as: What did he want to do with his life? Brian recalls that something about Matt captured his heart, so he asked if he could paint his portrait. In the encounter, a relationship began that developed into a friendship. Brian closes the Storycorps story by sharing the reason he finally stopped to speak to Matt: “Everyone deserves to be seen with the eyes of love.”

I do not know the religious background of either Brian or Matt (this story does not share those details), but what Brian shares at the end should be a fundamental belief of every follower of Jesus. The belief that *“everyone deserves to be seen with the eyes of love”* should be a driving factor that pushes us out of our comfort zones and into new and vulnerable relationships where God’s presence might be felt and celebrated.

“Everyone deserves to be seen with the eyes of love.”

— Brian Peterson,
NPR Storycorps

My prayer is that you will use these two examples to help your disciples reflect on the ways in which they might engage other people, while following the instructions of Jesus.

Take a Moment

1. How can we help disciples become more aware of and open to God's prevenient grace moving in our relationships?
2. How might we assist disciples in breaking down the prejudices that often cloud our ability to see the people in our lives more fully?
3. How can we embrace a daily attitude that *everyone deserves to be seen through the eyes of love*?

Our Daily Prayer as Disciples

God, help me to see the people that you place in my life each and every day. Amen.

*“Everyone
deserves to be
seen with the
eyes of love.”*

— Brian Peterson, NPR Storycorps

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’”

— ACTS 17:22-28

Start with Listening & Learning

It seems that Paul, in every city that he entered, began by looking carefully at the people and the religious practices. I believe Paul's amazing success throughout his ministry came in part due to his ability to listen and learn and then to develop strategies; ways of communicating that met people where they were in order to introduce them to the good news of the gospel in practical and meaningful ways. As Paul addresses the Athenians, he mentions practices they value and connects them to his understandings of the unknown God they have yet to experience. Paul speaks of a God they seem to be

seeking based on all that Paul has observed. Paul reveals to them, using the words of their own poets, a description of a God who is the very foundation of our being. Deep listening and learning is the place to start if we seek to speak meaningfully, connecting with the values, hopes, and dreams of others.

Listening to the Unchurched and Dechurched

Although there is no substitute for firsthand accounts and experiences when it comes to listening to and learning from people in our communities, some generalizations may help us as we try to see and connect with those who are outside our churches. In *Churchless*, George Barna and David Kinnaman drew data from a series of eighteen nationwide surveys conducted with adults between 2008 and 2014. What I appreciate about Barna and Kinnaman's research is that it comes from the perspectives of those who have either never been to church or who left the church for various reasons. These are the perspectives we must be listening to if we truly seek to see and connect with people outside of our churches. Here are a few highlights that I find helpful for our missional engagement:

- Despite technology that connects, those outside the church say they are becoming increasingly lonely and are looking for relational connections.
- They have a growing concern about the future.
- Their stress in life is increasing.
- One in four has never experienced church.
- One in three consider themselves to be “spiritual.”
- Fifty-seven percent say faith is important to them.
- Fifty-six percent are single.
- Forty-six percent say family is a high priority.
- One in four self-identify as “skeptical,” “agnostic,” or “atheist.”
- Only fifteen percent see the lifestyles of Christians as being noticeably more positive than the norm.

When asked about their values, the following are important to them:

- Doing good / good works
- Peace / unity (even in disagreement)
- Wholeness / health / healing
- Community / belonging
- Wisdom—practical advice that works in life
- Mentoring / help with growth as individuals

Does the gospel of Jesus Christ and the community Jesus called into existence have anything to say, any meaningful way of relating, in these areas? I believe we do.

Take a Moment

1. Which of these characteristics can you affirm in the people you encounter in your community?
2. To what unchurched people might you reach out to to affirm or challenge some of these statements?
3. Which of these speak to you? Which ones might inform your community engagement?
4. Which of these surprised you about those outside the church?

If enough leaders around the table identify unchurched people in their lives, consider inviting those unchurched people to be on a panel for your church to learn more about their concerns in life. Keep the questions open-ended and nonleading. Center the discussion on learning from them, not preaching to them.

MissionInsite

MissionInsite is a valuable tool available to all United Methodists through your annual conference. MissionInsite is excellent for learning about your community, understanding trends, plotting the radius of reach based on current membership, and so much more. Consider designating someone from your congregation to spend some time on MissionInsite exploring your community. **See Figure A for more information about MissionInsite.**

Prayer Walks

One tool that more disciples are using in order to get to know their communities better is prayer walks. For our purposes, two types of prayer walks can benefit church and community. In the first type an individual or a group walks through the neighborhood in a spirit of discernment. As the members walk, they pray for God's vision for the area. They pray for the people who reside in the neighborhood, seeking to receive greater clarity about their ministry. The second type offers a more hands-on approach. Church members gather and receive a short informal training, are sent out to be vulnerable, introduce themselves as neighbors, offer to pray for specific needs, and collect prayer requests and contact information if persons desire continued prayer.

Whatever variation of the prayer walk you try, keep it simple: Gather a group of disciples together, pair up, and go out into the community with the hope of trying to see the community with new eyes. After the prayer walk, plan on meeting at a central location at a given time to reflect on your experience. As you walk through your neighborhood, pray that you might see what God wants you to see. Bring paper and pencil to jot down street names or make notes about what you are seeing. Take pictures along the way, particularly of anything that takes you by surprise. (Take pictures of individuals only with permission. Tell them the photos will only be shared in a limited way with a small group seeking to learn more about the community—and will then be deleted.)

Engage people in conversation if they seem open to it. Ask open-ended questions about themselves and their view of the community. How long have they lived here? How has the community changed over that time? What do they love most about the community? What do they like least? What could be improved? If they seem open, ask: Is there anything we could be in prayer for you about? May we share this prayer request with the people where we serve? With their permission, jot down their name and address for future follow-up.

Learning from Local Businesses

Another tool that gets people into their communities is the “Demographics By Walking Around” survey, developed for TeamWorks (www.TeamWorksUMC.org). Use the survey on the following page to visit at least three businesses near the church. Ask each person to fill out a survey for each place they visit. This survey will help you reflect on what successful businesses are doing to engage their customers.

Confirming Research with Intentional Conversations

What questions has your MissionInsite research, conversations with local businesses, and prayer walks raised? Begin to plan intentional conversations with community leaders to affirm or challenge your findings. Or, plan more prayer walks with new sets of questions for those people you encounter. If you had positive encounters during your previous prayer walks, go back to those individuals with your follow-up questions.

When combined, these four approaches will begin to help you paint a picture of your community. Only after deep learning and listening can we begin to brainstorm strategies for intentionally engaging our communities and for equipping disciples for seeing all the people God calls us to reach.

DEMOGRAPHICS BY WALKING AROUND

Business (restaurant, clothing store, auto shop, etc.)

Assignment: As you visit a business, determine whom they are trying to reach.

How are they positioning themselves? Whom are they trying to reach?

- Atmosphere
- Type of product (food, clothing, etc.)
- Dress code
- Music in the background

Do the customers reflect the target audience?

How well do the staff reflect the customers?

- Dress Code
- Way they respond to customers
- Do they know their product?

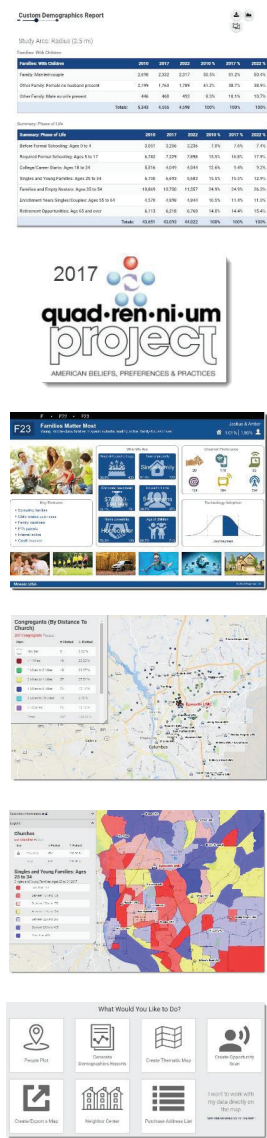
Service

- Did you feel welcomed?
- Did you receive what you requested?
- Were you served in a timely fashion?

What implication does this have for your church?

Figure A

10 Key PeopleView System™ Ministry Applications



- 1) **Determine Best Ministry Opportunities** – Discovery of Ministry Opportunities Using MissionInsight's **PeopleView System™** Tools Built on Google Maps.
- 2) **Answer Strategic Ministry Questions in Your Community** – What Type of Households Live in Your Ministry Area? Which Neighborhoods Are Growing? What is The Diversity in Your Community? **Does Your Church Membership and Mission Reflect Your Community?**
- 3) **Understand Population Trends BEFORE They Happen with Always Current Demographic Information from STI Pop Stats** – Accepted as a Premier Demographic Forecaster by Companies like Kroger and Walgreens. Information is Updated Twice Each Year Including the 2010 Census, **Current Year Estimates, 5 Year Projections and 10 Year Forecasts.**
- 4) **Make Informed Ministry Decisions Based on LOCAL Religious Preferences, Practices, and Beliefs** – MissionInsight's Proprietary Quadrennium Project: An National Survey of American Religious Preferences, Practices, and Beliefs. The Only Current **Religious Information at Neighborhood Level** Available to Local Churches. **NEW! 2017 MinistryInsight and ReligiousInsight Priorities Reports for local churches!**
- 5) **Identify and Reach Households in Your Ministry Area with MOSAIC USA Lifestyle Segmentation by Experian** – A Global Segmentation System Classifying More than 1 Billion People Worldwide in More than 30 Countries, Updated Annually. The 71 Distinct MOSAIC Household Types Provide the Most Comprehensive Lifestyle Information Available Today. Tom Bandy's **Mission Impact Guide Suggests Ministry Applications** for Each MOSAIC Household Type.
- 6) **Target Specific Demographic Variables with Opportunity Scan** – The Leading Tool for Analyzing and Identifying Regional, Community and Neighborhood Ministry Potential – Down to the Block Group Level (Approx. 1500 Persons). Create Maps and Data Tables with **Top Ministry Target Areas for Your Church or Regional Agency.**
- 7) **Analyze Ministry Opportunities with PeoplePlot** – A Secure System for Local Churches to View and Identify Church Members and Visitors on a Map. Compare Church Households to Neighborhood Households Using the Proprietary **ComparativeInsight Report which includes the Estimated Financial Support Potential for Congregations.** Employ Analytical Tools For Development of Small Group Ministry, Mission Locations and Satellite Ministries.
- 8) **Create Neighborhood Thematic Maps** – Create and Print Custom Neighborhood Maps from More Than 76 Demographic Variables to **Visually Display Mission Reality.**
- 9) **Create Customizable Reports** – **Choose Only the Information You Want:** Ultimate Flexibility in Selecting Strategic Report Variables for Specific Ministry Applications.
- 10) **Accomplish Essential Tasks in Seconds with NEW USER ASSISTANTS** – Easy Access to Plotting People, Generating Reports & Theme Maps, Opportunity Scan, Create & Export Maps, Neighbor Center and the Purchase of Address Lists with our new User Assistants. Designed for new and returning users as a simplified means to complete essential **PeopleView System™** tasks without additional training.

Take a Moment

1. List everything you currently know about your community—leave nothing out—capture as much as your leadership team can think of or recall. Describe the people, types of employment, general wants, needs, struggles ... and so on.
2. Make a list of questions to research further. What are you certain of? What needs testing? What are you clueless about?
3. List existing community events that tell you about your community. What community values do these events represent?
4. What are the learnings from your MissionInsite research?
5. What are the highlights from your prayer walks? What surprised you? What made your heart break?

So they [some Athenian philosophers] took him [Paul] and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means.” Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new.

— ACTS 17:19-21

Developing Strategies

As Paul listened and learned about the Athenian community, he noted an important piece of information: They would “spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new”—a significant characteristic worth noting, a value of the community. And thus Paul began to think about ways that he could meet them where they were and perhaps offer “something new” from the gospel of Jesus.

Listening to the Unchurched and Dechurched

Let us turn once again to *Churchless* by George Barna and David Kinnaman and lift up some highlights:

WHAT DOESN'T WORK

Those who participated in the survey noted the following strategies either had no effect or had a negative effect:

- Impersonal media / direct mail
- Advertising / billboards
- Treating skeptics like they have a spiritual void (described as “offensive”)

- Attempts to “defend” the faith was deemed not interesting
- Language use and motivation of the group often pushed them away

An important note from this research: According to the unchurched and dechurched, a relational approach does not work unless it involves lots of listening.¹

Take a Moment

1. How have we sometimes focused on defending the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ instead of sharing it? Do you find yourself defending or sharing more often? Why do you think this would matter from the perspective of someone who is outside of the church?
 2. What part do you think language and motivation play in communicating with those who are unchurched? Why does this matter?
-

WHAT WORKS

Some strategies will prove more effective than others. Continuing from *Churchless*, here are some highlights from the perspective of the unchurched or dechurched:

- Public events / concerts / music (10% positive)
- Opportunities helping the needy in their community / loving the poor (12% positive)
- Connecting meaningfully with older adults (14% positive)
- House churches / small groups (16% liked)

These generalizations offer important input as we begin to brainstorm strategies.

¹ *Churchless*, 151–52.

Take a Moment

1. Which of these strategies does your church already employ?
 2. Which of these have you talked about trying?
 3. How might you combine some of these to create a strong event to build relationships with those in your community?
-

Developing Strategies through Brainstorming

Now take some time to develop strategies for your context. Follow these instructions and guiding questions to generate your list.

1. List the talents and resources that already exist in your church.
2. List any and all strategies you can think of to engage your community (no idea is silly—list them all!)
3. Are there existing community events that your church could support?
4. In what ways can the church engage more intentionally with existing events / strategies?
5. How can you equip and empower your disciples for better community engagement during events? What training is needed?

Putting It All Together: An Example of a "Restart"

When I served at Saint Mark UMC in Wichita we joined forces with Epworth UMC and began to share the relationship-based strategies that had served as the foundation of our community engagement. We focused first on seeing and intentionally connecting with all the people in our community, which resulted in new life for a dying

church. These strategies began to build critical mass for restarting the Epworth congregation—always centered on people and relationships—and later led to launching a new worship experience.

Epworth, founded during World War II, was once considered a prominent Methodist church in the Wichita urban area. Epworth had more than one thousand members in its heyday. Like many churches across the denomination, the church went into rapid decline as its once predominantly white neighborhood became more diverse. The church had to decide whether to close its doors when it ran out of money or to maximize its resources to ensure a Methodist missional presence in the southeast community of Wichita.

Epworth chose to maintain its ministry and legacy in the Wichita community rather than abandon its neighborhood. The leadership at Epworth asked for Saint Mark's help by entering into an "Elijah/Elisha" church model merger. Saint Mark would share knowledge, encouragement, and experiences about how to engage a multi-ethnic, multigenerational neighborhood. For a truly fresh start and a full embrace of new approach to ministry, the leadership of Epworth UMC voted to transfer operational control of their ministries and assets to Saint Mark.

This arrangement offered several benefits for both churches:

- Opportunities to reach and disciple more people for Jesus Christ
- Leadership opportunities for more people at Saint Mark and Epworth
- A new and refreshed sense of vitality and vision for both ministries
- Opportunities to enhance and expand mission in the local community
- Increased utilization of gifts, talents, skills, and creativity of existing members
- Increased community awareness of The United Methodist Church

The two churches put together a team of sixteen persons to relaunch the Epworth ministry location to become a multi-ethnic,

multigenerational, biblically centered, outwardly focused congregation to make disciples for Jesus Christ and transform the community. One-third Saint Mark members, one-third Epworth members, and one-third of people who were new to Saint Mark or Epworth made up the team. The team make-up ensured the presence of Saint Mark DNA, honored Epworth's legacy, and valued the new and fresh ideas offered by people with little history with either congregation.

Team members understood this assignment as short-term. This allowed them to work with a greater level of intensity with a clear goal in sight: a public relaunch of the Epworth ministry. They began with one central question, "How do we reach people in the southeast Wichita community?" Their task involved planning opportunities for the southeast Wichita community to experience and learn more about Saint Mark, to start and foster relationships with unconnected people in the area, and to develop those relationships by listening and building trust. They hoped in that way to gain a positive response from the community to a specific invitation to the public relaunch.

The team had about six months to accomplish its work. They began by learning and listening. The demographics of the local community provided great insight about the makeup of the neighborhood. Meeting with local business owners, school principals, city council representatives, and the neighborhood association gave the team real-time information that made the demographic information come to life.

The team discovered the hopes and dreams of people in the neighborhood. They learned that people in the area yearned for deeper connections. They realized that local churches in the area had not reached out in meaningful relational ways in response to the neighborhood's change over the previous ten years, and many churches had closed, sold their buildings, and moved on.

This group of newly informed, highly motivated people was now ready to engage the community. With a fresh burden for the people they were called to reach, they settled on four engagement opportunities designed to connect with their neighbors.

Prayer Walk

The first involved a prayer walk through the neighborhood. The team, along with members of Saint Mark and Epworth gathered on a Saturday morning and received a short training based on Luke 10:1-17. Their instructions: be vulnerable, introduce themselves as neighbors, offer to pray for any specific need, and collect prayer requests and contact information if persons desired continued prayer. Instead of inviting people to church, they invited them to attend a community block party for the purpose of meeting their neighbors.

People dressed in branded church T-shirts went out in groups of three to five. People who could not walk stayed in the sanctuary and prayed for those who went on the prayer walk. The walk concluded with a lunch, and people shared stories about their morning experiences. The stories shared were moving, and participants discovered that the people in that community had a real desire for authenticity as they met new friends. Many of the persons who went out to visit were pleasantly surprised that their fear of rejection and possibly having doors closed in their faces never happened. In fact, most of the people they visited in the neighborhood were happy that their neighbors took the time to introduce themselves.

Community Block Party

The second engagement opportunity was a community block party. The Epworth church held an annual fall yard sale for many years. The team decided to take this traditional event and transform it into a major community gathering. Instead of selling items to the neighbors, they chose to emphasize building relationships. The atmosphere was festive. Signs adorned the church yard inviting people to come meet their neighbors. Children's activities included a bounce house, face painting, and so on. The church provided free hot dogs and hamburgers. A local DJ played music. Youth played old-fashioned schoolyard games. People played board games. Church members staffed tents in the parking lot to highlight key ministry opportunities. Guests were invited to register and receive free giveaways donated by local businesses in the community. The registration card gave people

opportunities to stay connected with this new ministry. It also offered them a chance to volunteer to help plan other activities for their neighborhood.

The most important principle in planning the community block party was the emphasis on developing relationships. Often churches plan events, and members spend all their time serving and talking only to one another. In order to avoid this common pitfall, the team assigned a group of people whose only responsibility at this gathering was to meet people and listen to their stories.

Free Gas Giveaway

The third event connected our traditional understanding of outreach with engagement. The team established a budget amount they could allocate for this event. Based on the budget amount, the church offered practical help in the form of twenty dollars worth of free gas per vehicle. The church partnered with a local gas station and a local radio station. The gas station provided two free-drink coupons for every vehicle. The radio station ran a free ad for the event. The team met with the police department who offered assistance with traffic on the morning of the gas giveaway.

The launch team and other volunteers gathered on a Saturday morning for the actual event. Cars snaked through the neighborhood to receive free gas. While people waited in lines, team members went from car to car introducing themselves and thanking people for coming. They connected with people as they asked how they found out about the giveaway. They recognized some from the prayer walk and the community block party. When folks pulled up to the gas pump, one team member pumped gas and another shared information about the public relaunch of the church. Again, the launch team emphasized building relationships with their neighbors.

Open House

An open house provided the final engagement opportunity. The church invited many nonprofit executives who shared a similar mission: the chamber of commerce, key city officials, and board members from a few major helping agencies such as the Wichita Food Bank. The open house took place on a weekday in the late afternoon. The team billed the event as a mixer and an opportunity to network with persons who shared the same passion for transforming the community. Nearly one hundred people showed up! The open house featured live music and refreshments. Team members shared with those in attendance the vision for relaunch along with a simple invitation: “We want you to know that this facility is available for your use. We want to be good neighbors. If you have an idea for a way for us to partner in making this a better community, we would welcome a conversation.” The simple words created space for others to dream. The results were astonishing. Two major ministries of the church emerged from that gathering, both birthed with the energy and the financing of partners in the community.

All these events led to a successful relaunch of the Epworth Church (now known as Saint Mark Southeast) and ensured a missional presence in the community for years to come. Engaging with the community is no longer an afterthought, it is the continued focus of this newly created ministry.

Take a Moment

1. What will your first steps be?
2. How will you train your disciples for engagement?
3. How will you follow up with participants?
4. How will you unpack and learn from the event?
5. How will you use the stories to encourage future engagement?

Other Starting Places

Engagement in Local Schools

Teachers and staff at a particular high school gathered together prior to the start of the academic year. As they hugged hello and chatted about the brevity of the summer, they noticed the enormous wall in front of the meeting room. Small square pieces of paper covered the wall. Each piece of paper had the name of a student in the school. A district administrator asked the teachers and staff to peruse the list and place a check mark next to the names of all the students they knew or had spoken to in the previous year. They jockeyed for position in front of the wall, marker tips exposed and checked the names of the kids they knew. Then they stepped back. As they stared at all the names on the wall, a mosaic of those names *without* check marks formed.

“These are the kids who really need us,” the administrator said plainly. “These are the kids who are about to slip through the cracks.” Schools lose students, she said, to a raft of issues, from poverty to gangs, from peer pressure to pregnancy. The common denominator in each loss, she said, was a kind of invisibility or anonymity at school for that student.

“These are the kids who really need us.”

Through this process, teachers and administrators realized there were some children in the school that virtually no adult had talked to. No coach recruited them for the wrestling or volleyball team. No English teacher encouraged them to spice up their writing with adverbs. No math teacher imparted to them the mysteries of exponents. No sponsor hosted them at after-school chess or Latin club meetings. “Often,” the administrator continued, “simply having a connection was enough to save a student.” Many of these students manage to

hang on; but just as many with no connections begin to believe what their daily school routines reinforce—no one knows or cares that they are alive. Schools lose them to a bundle of negativity, a lack of meaningful relationships.

This process generated a somber resolve in the teachers and staff as they continued to stare at the names with no marks. The teachers thought about the students who in the past may have slipped through their grasp. They left the school that day determined never to let that happen to another child.

School districts nationwide have tackled this isolation issue. The Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program began in many districts as a way of focusing on overlooked students in the often forgotten middle: the *B* and *C* students who received neither the heavenly attention of the honor students nor the anguish-filled attention of failing and misbehaving pupils. Educators recognized that with more attention and connection, students who found themselves in the middle could become high achievers. But first, the educators had to see those students. All of them.

Where connection is key, actually seeing the people you want to serve comes first.

Many churches provide excellent outreach to local schools. Programs like backpacks for kids and school supply drives are ways to begin a relationship with schools in your community. However, the key comes in moving beyond a program to a sustained effort to develop and build relationships with students and teachers. How will you demonstrate that you see them and you care for them?

Discipleship & Social Justice: Toward Real Transformation

*But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile,
and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your
welfare.*

—Jeremiah 29:7

When my bishop appointed me to start a new church, it didn't have a name. I will never forget how I felt hearing Bishop Melvin Talbert read the appointments that year at the California-Nevada Annual Conference: Junius Dotson—city of San Jose, California. He appointed me to the whole city! What a helpful way of seeing our ministry. We have a prophetic call to seek the well-being of the whole city. We make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Transformation begins in the local community. Our engagement in the local community creates a climate where growing disciples can wrestle with how to make the Word become flesh in their local context.

The most effective training I received in starting a new congregation came in community organizing. Community organizing focuses on building relationships, bringing people together, and then leveraging those relationships to make progress on issues of concern.

When local churches deeply engage with their community, significant moments will occur that require spiritual leaders to act. Effective and meaningful witness is possible when we have done the work of developing and cultivating relationships. In moments of crisis or tension, people trust the leaders with whom they are in relationship. They seek out churches who have demonstrated a pattern of caring and connecting in love with those around them.

Shortly before leaving Wichita to become the General Secretary of Discipleship Ministries, I helped organize a citywide forum in an effort to prevent a violent response to explicit police violence in Wichita and the surrounding communities. Dr. Kevass Harding of Dellrose

United Methodist Church and I watched the crowds and tensions in Ferguson, Missouri, gather and explode in response to the August 2014 shooting death of Michael Brown, an eighteen-year-old African American teenager, shot by Darren Wilson, a twenty-six-year-old Ferguson policeman. We did not want that to happen in Wichita, which has a mixed history in the area of race relations.

Wichita has produced social change agents like Donald Hollowell, an African American civil rights lawyer, who on multiple occasions helped free civil rights icons such as Julian Bond, John Lewis, and the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. from incarceration. Hollowell was so revered that residents in King's hometown of Atlanta called him Mr. Civil Rights. He gave Washington lawyer and power broker Vernon Jordan his first job. Wichita also produced Hattie McDaniel, the first African American to win an Oscar. The youth group of the Wichita branch of the NAACP launched the first successful student-led sit-in in the nation in 1958, almost two years before the more famous sit-in of Greensboro, North Carolina. And though Wichita had a huge Ku Klux Klan presence, a celebrated baseball game between the Negro League baseball team and the Monrovia took place in an attempt to find common ground in the area of sports.

However, Wichita also was the first city outside of the South to be federally investigated for housing discrimination. The city finally decided to desegregate its public schools in 1972, some eighteen years after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregation decision, and it did so after considering forgoing the federal funds tied to integration.

So, as Dr. Harding and I pondered how best to make progress on police/community relations in Wichita, while factoring in the noble and not-so-noble racial history of the Midwest city, we found ourselves questioning systems, processes, and infrastructure.

THE PLAN FOR ENGAGEMENT

Dr. Harding and I put together a team to plan a citywide event to address the issue. The credibility we brought to the table was forged by years of engaging our community. We had developed authentic,

organic, and consistent relationships with leaders and community members that set the stage for an effective gathering. Only the foundation of engagement allowed us to pull this off. Years of attending city council meetings, community celebrations, ministerial league meetings, and neighborhood association gatherings provided a level of trust from city and community leaders. We assembled a “premeeting” with the mayor, interim police chief, superintendent of schools, pastors, our bishop, and other key leaders. Together we laid out the plan for the citywide gathering.

The citywide gathering filled a high school auditorium and drew heavy media coverage as well as participation from city government and law enforcement. When the temperature at this event got heated as people spoke out in frustration, we could calm the waters as we addressed people by name. More importantly, we knew their stories and this changed the nature of the public interaction. At this event, we and other concerned citizens witnessed firsthand what happens when churches engage in the community. Community engagement earns churches the credibility, trust, and influence to bring people together to make progress on complex issues.

What does this mean? We achieved our primary objective of avoiding clashes between police and the community. In follow-up meetings with a small group, city officials agreed to equip officers with body cameras. They also agreed to train officers in mental health issues and include new curriculum that addressed racial bias in policing.

AN UNEXPECTED RESULT

This experience afforded Dr. Harding and me an opportunity to work directly with millennial leaders unconnected to any church. Prior to this community engagement, they perceived the church as irrelevant, playing little role in restoring community trust. Our efforts did not go unnoticed. Less than a year later, the new police chief partnered with community and church leaders to plan a community BBQ outing to continue building and growing relationships.

Now, many who were outside the church regularly foster dialogue and community with growing disciples who decided to engage

their community. The story is still being written, but I believe these encounters can be the first awareness of God's prevenient grace working in their lives, a first introduction to Jesus, and an introduction to a church that is relevant to their lives and to the well-being of their communities.

Take a Moment

1. Does your church currently work with a local school? How might this work become more engaging, more about relationship-building, more about seeing all the children and teachers in your community?
2. Does your church have a history of working in the community tackling societal or systemic problems? How do our journeys as disciples and our love for all people lead us to seek real transformation for our communities and our schools?
3. If your church has never attempted such engagement, what are some first steps?

Engagement across the Connection

Discipleship Ministries has been gathering examples of community engagement from around the connection. A few are shared below. To share your stories, we invite you to visit SeeAllThePeople.org.

Germany

TENT MISSION

The Tent Mission of the Germany United Methodist Conference serves all UM churches in Europe. We provide tools and resources to aid local churches with their mission in and to their communities. We have eleven modern fully equipped tents ranging in size from fifty to six hundred in seating. The tents can be used for traditional mission evenings but can also be used for culinary events, youth events, game nights, music festivals, etc. We also have a mission bus that is a mobile street cafe. Along with the mobile stage unit, the bus is a useful tool for outreach and events in the marketplace / outside the church walls. Other resources include an inflatable church, inflatable climbing wall, and human foosball table. Along with these resources we provide training in how to use them effectively. We encourage local churches to see these resources as a means to bless their neighborhood with fun days, family days, church festivals, and community days. In the training we encourage church leaders to use these resources to spend time with and get to know their neighbors better.

INSPIRE CHEMNITZ

INSPIRE is a Fresh Expressions ministry of the Germany Conference and has been up and running on the Brühl in Chemnitz for over two

years. It has been an amazing adventure, with loads of experimenting, and new doors of opportunities to serve continually being opened to us. Below are some of the regular happenings at INSPIRE:

Bring & Share Brunch

On the first Sunday morning of the month we have a special neighborhood brunch. The INSPIRE team makes tea and coffee and provides some basics like bread, butter, honey, etc. Everyone from the community is invited to attend and bring something to share. All the food offerings are placed on a large community table, and we all sit down and have brunch together. There is always enough to eat for everyone—even for those who could not contribute. The *Bring & Share Brunch* is a great way to get to know your neighbors and build community.

Music Mondays

On Monday evenings INSPIRE changes into a singer/songwriter music bar. It started with a small group of musicians jamming together but has developed and grown into one of the top music venues in the city. At the start, we had mostly young newcomers from the region. We have also hosted inspiring musicians and artists from the UK, US, Australia, and Canada. The space is often packed with guests ... on a Monday night! (Just think about that for a moment!)

Refugee Ministries

Two years ago, when more than a million refugees arrived in Germany, we started a “One World” welcome cafe for refugees who had arrived in the city. We served coffee and cake and helped them to learn German. We recently added a weekly homework club for the children, helping them to adapt to German school life. This is a vital ministry, investing in young lives, hopefully enabling a better future for them.

INSPIRE Kids

This is a joint venture with the *Bethanien Diakonissenstiftung*, a foundation of the United Methodist Church in Germany. In the backyard of INSPIRE we have a former circus wagon. Keren Cascione, a social worker employed by *Bethanien* and supported by a team of volunteers, runs a children’s program every afternoon. This is another

significant ministry that impacts the lives of children, many of whom face huge challenges in life.

Whisky & Wine Tastings

Our whisky and wine tasting events are an INSPIRE classic; tickets for these events often sell out! These evenings are not only an opportunity to learn the finer details about wines and whiskeys of the world from experts, but the event is also a great foundation for conversation, building relationships, and deepening friendships. Some of our most faithful INSPIRE coworkers came to us initially through our “tasting” events!

International Student Group (ISG)

We believe God opens doors for us to serve people and make the world a better place. The ISG is the latest example of this. Jay, a musician in a punk band that performed at INSPIRE, is a teacher in his day job. He saw INSPIRE as the perfect location for a “language pub” for foreign students to practice speaking German. We agreed. And so we started with twenty of Jay’s students from Syria, China, United Arab Emirates, and other countries. With the help of small question cards, we discuss topics like “Five things I need to be happy.” We have learned from the Syrian participants to always appreciate family. One of them summed it up like this, “What I really only need, is my mother ...,” sharing with us that each day he Skypes with her in Damascus.

A Closing Note about INSPIRE

Some of our church friends reading this may be wondering: *Where the “spiritual” activities in INSPIRE happen. When do we preach? Is there no worship?* The cheeky answer might be, “Yes. All the time!” We are very clear at INSPIRE about who we are and what we are about. We are a community of faith, hope, and love. Our vision is to see our Brühl neighborhood “inspired,” with new life breathed into it (yes, even in a holistic sense). Our core team are all practicing Christians, but we also have many good friends and coworkers supporting our project who are of no faith or of different faiths. We all want to make this world a better place. This makes us very happy!

Our INSPIRE team meets every Thursday morning at 7:15 am to pray for and bless the neighborhood. As a team we also meet once a month in our homes to read the Bible and reflect on what it means for us to be followers of Christ today. Anyone is free to join us during these times. At Easter and Christmas we have special teaching initiatives and events at INSPIRE that delve deeper into the Christian faith. As a team we strive, in spite of our human failings and weaknesses, to live out our faith, showing our friends and neighbors what it means to be a Christian today. We take it as a compliment that we are known affectionately on the Brühl as “The Christians.” We are no longer surprised by the regular interest and questions that people often have for us, concerning our Christian faith.

Thank you and God bless you!

Barry Sloan & the INSPIRE Team

Rev. Dr. Barry Sloan
Director of Evangelism, UMC Germany

Philippines

KNOX UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Knox United Methodist Church's Loading Ministry is the church's outreach ministry to the street dwellers (homeless) of Manila, using the following strategies:

"Come and Eat!"

Church workers and lay members sought the street dwellers in the places they frequented and invited them to have free snacks every Tuesday afternoon. A table was set outside the church gate and warm porridge was served. A cupcake was added to their snack every third Tuesday. The offer for free snacks did not come with any condition for the street dwellers to participate in Knox UMC's church activities.

Eventually, full meals consisting of rice with viand and juice replaced the snacks after six months when they became active participants in a new worship service made for them.

"Have a refreshing bath!"

Personal hygiene was critical to the street dwellers. They used the restrooms in gasoline stations or paid P5.00 – P20.00 to use the showers or toilets in public markets. The streets would always be available if the first two options were unavailable. Knox UMC offered an area inside the church compound where they can bathe. Toiletries and towels were provided to them.

"We have some clothing our members would like you to have."

The church realized that the street dwellers needed a change of clothes after their bath. The offer of clothing made them aware that more church members were concerned about them.

"Would you like us to pray for you?"

Three months after the Loading Ministry's inception, the pastors invited the street dwellers interested to be prayed over inside the church. Those who accepted the invitation were brought to the altar where they were prayed over and anointed with oil by the pastors.

“A worship service like no other!”

Knox UMC developed a worship service that was sensitive to the diverse background of the street dwellers. The Word and its preaching were significant to their spiritual formation, but the overall service had to give off an atmosphere of fun. The Word was shared in a storytelling mode. Games, testimonies, group dynamics, health tips, Bible drills, teaching hymns and praise songs through the use of videoke were incorporated. A choir was formed from among them and the choir members were offered free lunch for the additional time they put in for practice.

“In sickness and in health...”

Medicine was offered to them whenever they were sick. They were given free medical consultations by church members who were physicians.

“We are involved in your life and death.”

Memorial services were held for Loading Ministry participants who had died. Financial help for their burial was also extended to their families.

“God loves you and so do we!”

There was constant affirmation to them that God loves them and Knox UMC is an instrument of God’s love.

Prepared by

Rev. Dr. Maritez C. Cruz,

Associate Pastor, Knox United Methodist Church

Conference Examples from the United States

FLORIDA CONFERENCE: FRESH EXPRESSIONS

In April 2014, conversation about Fresh Expressions took root in the Florida Conference of the UMC, thanks to the leadership of Bishop Ken Carter, Audrey Warren, and Vance Rains. Since then, Fresh Expressions has flourished across the conference—as of 2018, Fresh Expressions can be found in every district. As we consider the future of what church looks like, we believe that it will be a mixed economy of both traditional churches and Fresh Expressions. These two forms of church must exist together to reach a diverse population with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Fresh Expressions is an international movement that has us reaching new people in their backyards and moving beyond our conventional buildings, meetings, and leaders. It has the mindset of “we’ll come to you.” Fresh Expressions was created to be a form of church for the changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church. These communities come into being through principles of listening, serving, contextual mission, making disciples, and have the potential to become mature expressions of church shaped by the gospel. There are currently around 100 Fresh Expressions of church in the Florida Conference, which vary from gatherings around a community garden, to a pub group called Beer and Hymns, to a dog park called Paws of Praise. Every Fresh Expression may model connection with God and one another very differently, but the heart of each group is to reach new people in new ways and in new places.

The aim is to form a new gathering or network—church—that engages mainly with people who have never been to church and in their own context and culture. At its best, Fresh Expressions is led by laity and clergy and works alongside more traditional churches. When we traveled to the United Kingdom in 2015 to see where Fresh Expressions began, we learned how missional they are, how low cost and grassroots they should be, and how this becomes a community

of missional believers. They have a few things in common: gathered people with an interest of some kind, unabashedly Christ-centered, growing in faith with spiritual growth, and serving others together.

In the Florida Conference we have a Fresh Expressions Steering Committee, a Fresh Expressions Coordinator, and growing numbers of Fresh Expressions throughout the Conference. We support these pioneers as they emerge through micro-grants to enable small amounts of start-up funding.

There is a difference between a Fresh Expressions and a ministry of the church. Church initiatives, programs, and ministries serve many people in many ways. This is in no way to replace fruitful ministry work in the church. This is going beyond the walls of the church. An expression was used recently, “soft walls,” meaning that we go beyond the church buildings. A ministry tends to serve people differing from a Fresh Expression that stays in community with the people forming a unique community with no expectation of coming back to the church campus. In North Fort Myers, a Dinner Church called Eat, Pray, Love, gathers weekly, eats together, worships and prays, and hears a simple sermon. They begin to know each other and care about each other. Eat, Pray, Love developed organically into a loving community. They have had baptisms at their Dinner Church, as well as a wedding and a funeral.

While we are in this Post-Christendom era, Fresh Expressions are inspiring us to return to our Wesleyan roots, finding ways to bring the word of Christ, meet people where they are, and share hope.

Submitted by
Janet Earls
Director of Congregational Vitality

CALIFORNIA-PACIFIC CONFERENCE: SPIRITUAL ROOTS

As we seek to live out the call to Engaging Ministries in the diverse neighborhoods throughout the Cal-Pac Conference, we are discovering anew the value of the Wesleyan emphasis on the interrelationship between social justice and evangelization. As we strengthen our prophetic presence and witness in our communities, we encounter again and again a new, diverse generation of faith-based community organizers and activists who seek missional communities of spiritual support for living lives of compassion, justice, and joy.

It is out of this experience that the Justice and Compassion Essential Ministries Team of the Cal-Pac conference has declared the following as one of our strategic initiatives:

To strengthen and enable the prophetic voice and action of our connection.

Working for the alleviation of poverty, a more equitable distribution of wealth, and the building of the Beloved Community both locally and globally, while intentionally reaching out to those seeking to root their social justice activism in a community of faith and providing them a spiritual home.

In order to live out this initiative we have been holding “Mission Field Engagement” Workshops at strategically located congregations throughout the conference. These workshops focus on the ways the local church can develop strategies to “be a good neighbor in the hood” and to grow as a vital community of discipleship through building quality, transformative relationships with those who live in and who love their community.

Here are our basic guidelines for being a church that’s a good neighbor in the hood:

1. Be actively present in your community and enjoy discovering who is there. Both those in need and the social activists and organizations seeking to address those needs.

2. Move from “providing services” and “holding services” to building relationships of mutual blessing in which talents are nourished, gifts are shared and needs are addressed.
3. Stay very close to Jesus wherever you are.

Blessings from the City of Angels,

David Farley

Director of Justice and Compassion Ministries

California–Pacific Annual Conference

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“Engagement involves initiating and building relationships. Engagement seeks to ensure that outreach and evangelism efforts become a vital part of an intentional system of Discipleship.”

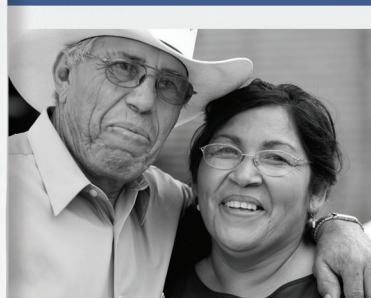
(Pg. 23, Engaging Your Community)

As part of the See All The People movement, this new practical book will push your congregation to engage the community around them as part of a discipleship system.



DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES
The United Methodist Church

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