**Shape

Description automatically generated with medium confidence**

**CONGREGATIONAL VITALITY TEAM**

**RESOURCES MANUAL**

**Introduction**

Greetings!

*Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.* (Romans 6:4)

The purpose of this manual is to aid you/your congregation in assessing your status as it relates to your church’s community, programs, membership, and pastoral care. Often, communities in which our congregations sit have and are changing, yet our church programs remain the same. Or they become a last-ditch effort to increase membership rather than serve the community needs in which it sits. This guide with allow you to have an ongoing relationship with yourself, your membership, and your community by doing an evaluation and using the resources and suggestions to keep your congregation thriving and vital.

The sections, **SPIRITUAL, RELATIONAL, CONGREGATIONAL VISIONING** and **TECHNOLOGY**, will assist you in answering questions such as: 1) how do you view your congregation/what is your congregation’s personality, 2) do you have a cross-generational membership, 3) do most of your members live in the immediate community of the church building or outside of it, 4) what is your community’s personality, 5) how does your congregation serve the community it worship and fellowship in, 6) is your membership a steward of the church building or the community the building sits in, 7) do your current ministries/outreach programs serve the needs of the community or the congregation or both, and finally, 8) do your current programs, if any, need to be revamped to better suit the needs of the community?

The manual and its resources are only a few examples and suggestions to help in building relationships within the congregation and community as well as enhancing spiritual relationships with self and others. Some congregations have successfully used the activities and devotions in this manual; however, it is suggested that you use whatever activities from here or other sources that are appropriate to your congregation’s and community’s personalities.

**NT-NL Congregational Vitality Team 2022**

Irma Banales

Jeff Borgwardt

Austin Nickels

Madeline Richard

Alicia Thompson-Summers

**Table of contents**

Spiritual 1

Relational 10

Congregational Visioning 24

Technology 52

**SPIRITUAL**



**IN TIMES OF CHANGE CONGREGATIONAL SPIRITUAL RESOURCES**

**FOR VITALITY & DISCERNMENT: OVERVIEW**

The following resources are ready-to-print handouts that are useful for congregations particularly for discernment in times of change. Five resources are simple formats for participatory bible studies and for other gatherings--whether led by pastors or laity. Two resources are appropriate for personal spiritual practice in deepening one’s spiritual life and in discernment for the life of the church. All of these resources are selected to assist congregations in times of change to discern God’s guidance for present and future faithfulness. If following some of the synod’s recommended topics for ensuring continuing faithfulness (church mission, neighbors/context, church history, etc.), these tools help congregations follow a spiritual path guided by God’s Spirit. **In essence, these tools are to help congregations in deepening spiritual vitality & in hearing God’s guidance for changes to ensure future faithfulness.**

**Pre-Evaluation Questions**

With the reality of immense cultural changes, as well of Covid, how has the spiritual

life of the congregation been?

What has changed for the congregational spiritual life in recent times? Is it stronger,

no change or weaker? Why or why not?

In knowing, loving, serving God, is anything gained or lost?

**\\\**

**SUMMARY OF THE SPIRITUAL RESOURCES FOR GROUP DISCERNMENT FOR THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

**BIBLE STUDY: MISSIONAL LISTENING TO GOD *(group handout for times of change).***

This is a complete “ready-to go” Bible study handout (without scriptures) for listening to God’s guidance for congregational future faithfulness. Missional & other appropriate scriptures to be used may be selected according to congregational context & the nature of discernment needed.

**COMMUNAL “HOLY LISTENING” FAITHFULNESS IN TIMES OF CHANGE (*group handout).***

This is a handout for a complete bible study gathering using the traditional form of the ancient practice of holy listening to God through holy scriptures *(lectio divina).* Words are included here for the leader to guide the group through the process of holy listening and discerning.

**“DWELLING IN THE WORD” FOR DISCERNMENT** *(****group instructional handout).***

Provided here is an instructional handout for a Bible study gathering using an even more conversational way of hearing God’s guidance through group reflection concerning a short Bible passage. This is suitable for church council meetings, shorter bible study gatherings, etc.

**LIST OF MISSIONAL BIBLE PASSAGES FOR DISCERNMENT IN CHANGIMG TIMES**

Here is a sample list of brief passages to assist in hearing God’s desire for the world and in discerning how God would have the church continue to be faithful in these changing times.

**SUMMARY OF THE RESOURCES FOR PERSONAL SPIRITUAL PRACTICE ESPECIALLY IN CHANGING TIMES**

**BREATH PRAYER** (***instructional handout for personal spiritual practice)***

As church members are encouraged to keep the church in prayers, this is a spiritual practice for personal use of individuals. Especially in times of change when worshippers and visitors are urged to pray for future faithfulness of the church, this personal spiritual practice is useful in learning to “pray always.” This spiritual discipline is most appropriate for those with an understanding that God is leading them on a serious spiritual journey**.**

**JESUS PRAYER (*instructional handout for personal spiritual practice)***

In times of change in the church’s life and, truly, in any time in the church’s life, worshippers may find this personal spiritual practice useful in enabling them to be open to God’s guidance in life and in the life of the church. The spiritual practice of the Jesus Prayer can become a natural part of an individual’s life--shaping that person with mindfulness and unity with our Lord.

**+ + +**

**BIBLE STUDY: LISTENING TO GOD FOR FUTURE FAITHFULNESS**

*THE OVERALL FOCUS BEHIND THIS BIBLE STUDY PRACTICE IS TO UNDERSTAND WHAT GOD IS CALLING OUR CHURCH, THE**BODY OF CHRIST, & EACH OF US TO BE & DO.*

**INVOCATION**

### In the name of the Father, and the + Son, and the Holy Spirit.

**PRAYER**

Almighty God, your mission is to redeem the world. Help us, dear Lord, with trusting hearts to follow you in sharing the good news of our Lord, the crucified, risen Christ. In Jesus’ name we pray. **Amen**

**WORD** *(provide the group the chosen scripture for this gathering***)**

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What is God or our Lord doing in this Bible reading?

2. What is the response or action of the persons (or person) in the reading?

How does this relate to our congregation?

3. What are we hearing God ask our congregation & us to do through this reading?*(Thoughts should be recorded for the pastor.)*

**GROUP ACTION or OTHER COMMUNITY DISCUSSION (***Optional. Topics such as the church’s mission at this time, questions regarding neighbors/context, other topics* ***preparing for change*** *can be included here in this worshipful setting of listening to God.)*

**PRAYER**

**BLESSING** *(laity wording of blessing)*

Almighty God, the Father, + the Son, and the Holy Spirit bless and preserve us. **Amen**

or

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and our minds in Christ. **Amen**

or

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

or

**Community Blessing**

*Each person, one after the other, turns to the person beside him/her and says simple words of blessing, as* ***“May God bless you”*** *or* ***“God’s Peace,”*** *or other simple words. If the community desires, the one saying blessing words may make the sign of the cross on the forehead of the one being blessed while saying words of blessing.*

**+ + +**

### COMMUNAL “HOLY LISTENING” TO GOD FOR FAITHFULNESS IN TIMES OF CHANGE

*The question is:* ***“What is God calling our church, the body of Christ, to be & do?”***

**INVOCATION: In the name of the Father, and the + Son, and the Holy Spirit.**

**OUR MISSION------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------**

**PRAYER:** Almighty God, your mission is to redeem the world. Help us, dear Lord, with trusting hearts to follow you in sharing the good news of our Lord, the crucified, risen Christ. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

*(Before beginning, choose only a very brief scripture for this traditional way of listening to God. Below are the leader’s words to guide the group through the process of holy reading/listening.)*

**WORD**

**COMMUNAL HOLY LISTENING** *(ancient prayerful tradition, lectio divina)*

(Beginning *Prayer:***“Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful…)”**

**READ/HEAR *(****“lectio”****):* “**With open mind & heart receive thereading as if God is reaching out to you.” *(Passage is read slowly. Silence.)*

**REFLECT/MEDITATE (***“meditatio”***): “**After this next reading, you are invited to spend timeallowing your mind & imagination to ponder the words. We are not analyzing; simply, notice what thoughts or images bubble up and get your attention.”

*(Passage is read a 2nd time. Silence).*

*(Invite members to go around the room and--if the person chooses--to share thoughts, images, etc. that captured his/her attention. All listen without interpreting or asking questions to another.)*

**RESPOND** *(“oratio”)”* When we are open to God--an encounter with God--God always elicits a response--such as gratitude, an action, sorrow, an insight, etc.

What response or action might God be asking of our congregation and of you?.

*(Passage is read a 3rd time. Silence.)*

*(Individuals share and prayerfully discuss together.)*

**REST IN OUR LORD *(“****comtemplatio****”)* “**For this final reading, you are invited simply to relax and rest in God peacefully.”

*(Passage is read a final time. Silence.)*

**GROUP ACTION or OTHER RESPONDING COMMUNITY DISCUSSION** *(Optional}*

**PRAYER**

**WORDS OF BLESSING**

**+ + +**

**DWELLING IN THE WORD**

*This is an instructional handout for an informal communal way of abiding and listening to God. The unusual element in this Bible study is the practice of summarizing what your “partner” has said. This helps everyone learn not only to listen to God but also to learn to offer deep listening to others. This format seems especially appropriate for council & other such gatherings.*

**STEPS FOR “DWELLING IN THE WORD”**

*1.* Start with a prayer, inviting the Spirit to guide your attending to the Word of God.

*2***.** Turn to Luke 10:1-12. Later you may choose your own passage, a story related to your group’s work. But start with Luke 10: 1-12, because it works for many people all over the world – it is a good starting place. Have Bibles or copies of the verse available.

*3.* Begin with one person reading this passage aloud to the group. Then allow some silence to unfold as people let the words have their impact.

*4***.** Next, instruct folks in this way:

---Find a person in the group you know least well (one might call this person a “reasonably friendly-looking stranger.”

---Listen that person into free speech as he or she tells you what they heard in the passage. The intention is for each person to allow his/her mind and imagination to freely respond to whatever comes to mind. This is not about analyzing the text.

Listen that person into answering one of these questions with focus on the life of the church:

1. What captured your imagination?
2. What did the passage bring to your mind?

c.) What question would you like to ask a Biblical scholar?

---Listen well to your partner’s thoughts because your job will be to report to the rest of the group what your partner has said, not what you yourself said. Note-taking is OK.

*5***.** Then, turn folks loose with their partners for 6-10 minutes. Notice how they pay attention to the words of one another. When you draw them back together, ask for them to tell what they learned from their partners.

*6.* Lastly, wrestle together as a group. Ask, “What might God be up to in the passage for us?” Let people know that, as your conversation on other matters continues, anyone at any time may call for the Gospel, and the group will return to the passage once again. Remain in the same passage over an extended period of time (weeks or months). You will be amazed at the continual flow of blessings from doing so.

*NOTE: This form of congregational Bible study is highly encouraged by former Bishop Kevin Kanouse of NTNL synod. This content comes from Dwelling in the Word: A Pocket Handbook. Pat Taylor Ellison*

**+ + +**

**LIST OF MISSIONAL BIBLE PASSAGES FOR DISCERNMENT IN CHANGING TIMES:**

**GOD’S MISSION IS OUR MISSION**

*Here is a sample list of brief passages expressing God’s mission and intention for the world. We see clearly that God’s merciful mission in the world is also our calling--that God’s church is sent into the world with God’s own mission. This list may be helpful when a brief passage is desired for discernment in times of change.*

**GENESIS 12:1-3** The Lord said to Abram: Go out from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you,I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.I will bless those who bless you, I will curse those who treat you with contempt, **and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.**

**ISAIAH 6:8** Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying: Who should I send? Who will go for us? I said: Here I am. **Send me.**

**MATTHEW 10:7-8** As you go, **proclaim this message**: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’  **Heal** the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. 

**MATTHEW 24:14** This good news of the kingdom will be **proclaimed in all the world** as a testimony to all nations. And then the end will come.

**MATTHEW 28:18-20** Then Jesus came near & said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven & on earth. **Go, therefore, & make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**

**MARK 16:15** **Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.**

**LUKE 4: 18-19,21** [Jesus] unrolled the scroll…:“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me **to bring good news to the poor**. He has sent me to proclaim **release to the captives** and recovery of **sight to the blind**, to **let the oppressed go free**,to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

**LUKE 24:46-48** "This is what is written: the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins **would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations,** beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And look, I am sending you what my Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high."

**JOHN 20:21** Jesus said... "Peace to you! As the Father has sent me, **I also send you."**

**ACTS 1:8** But you **will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you**, and **you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**

**+ + +**

**BREATH PRAYER: Personal “listening always” for God’s will for church & self**

*Breath prayer is an ancient Christian prayer practice dating back to at least the sixth century. Breath prayer is a good example of “praying without ceasing,” as St. Paul admonished us to do, and has the potential to become as natural as breathing. It is intended to be a very short prayer of praise or petition (just six to eight syllables or shorter). The words of the prayer can be easily adjusted to the longing of the heart.*

*Praise is expressed by calling on one of the Divine names such as God, Jesus, Lord, Holy One, Father/Mother, Christ, Spirit. or another name of adoration. Choose the name most meaningful and authentic for you personally.*

*Following the divine name, you add a few words reflecting the longing of your heart. The breath prayer is usually said silently inwardly and joined to the breathing inward and outward. Some people sing or chant the breath prayer. We have inherited this transformative tradition that can become for us a way of mindfulness always to the Lord to whom we belong. Here are some steps for discerning your breath prayer.*

*1.* Close your eyes and recall the line “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). Be still, calm, peaceful, open to the presence of God.

2*.* With your eyes closed, imagine that God is calling you by name. Imagine that God is actually asking, “(*your name)* what do you want? Like the blind man on the road to Jericho, Jesus kindly looks you in the eyes and asks, “What do you want from me?

*3.* Give God a simple and direct answer that comes honestly from your heart. Write down the answer. If you have more than one answer, write them down. Your answer may be one word such as ‘peace’, ‘love’ or ‘help’. It may be several words or a phrase such as “know your presence” or “lead me into life.” Whatever your answers, they are the foundation of your breath prayer.

4. Prayerfully & slowly select the name you are most comfortable to use speaking with God. Combine it with your written answer to God’s question. This is your prayer.

5. Breathe in the first phrase/word (usually your invocation of God’s name) and breathe out the second phrase/word (request, need, etc).

You may need to compose several prayers before you find one which truly arises from deep within. It may be the same from day to day or may change. Another idea: Sometimes you may want to reverse the practice in silence by letting the Spirit reveal your name and God’s desire for you.  You may wind up hearing something like, “Beloved, you are enough,” etc. Wait on God and see how you may be renewed.

**Sample Breath Prayers**

Jesus, mercy; Dearest Lord, guide me/us; Holy one, heal me/us;

Holy Spirit, show me/us; Father/Abba, help me/us

**+ + +**

**THE JESUS PRAYER**



From early Christianity, Christian tradition through the ages has gifted us with the “Jesus Prayer,” a prayer of the heart which embodies the essence of true prayer. Method-less and simple, this prayer cuts right to the heart of prayer which is---openness to God's presence.

The “Jesus Prayer” consists simply in uttering the single word "Jesus" (or "Lord Jesus", or more often **"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner")**, either aloud or silently.  In this invocation of the holy name of Jesus (based on Bartimaeus’ plea, Mark 10:48), we are enabled to **pray always**. This is possible because it is our one occupation: that of loving God, who is made present through our Lord Jesus Christ

When you pray this prayer, do not concentrate on the name, the word, the sound, or the letters. Do not think of the name but of **Jesus.** And do not try to meditate on scenes from the Gospels or truths from theology. The word(s) is customarily joined to one’s breathing and becomes a natural connection between your breath and God’s Spirit. Just reach out to Jesus in blind faith.

"**The principal thing is to stand before God with the mind in the heart and**

**to go on standing before God unceasingly day and night, until the end of life."**

**+ + +**

**Post-evaluation questions**

In using some of these spiritual resources, how has the congregational faith journey

been impacted?

How will the congregation incorporate what has been learned into the everyday life

of the church?

What more does the congregation need for growth in its maturing relationship with

our Lord?

**RELATIONAL**

**Outreach and Community**



The resources and activities in this section are directly related to being relational in our ministry together. In some ways, these materials are an extension of the previous section (spiritual) and the section which follows (congregational visioning), as they get to the heart of our relationship with God and the community around us, even as we connect with others in our congregation. The relationships that we have God, one another, and the community around us, both as individuals and as congregations, are essential to the renewal, life, and vitality of our congregations. Please use these materials as an introduction of what it might look like for a congregation and its leadership to embark upon a journey of renewal.[[1]](#footnote-1) In addition to the resources and activities, we have included reflection questions for your use as you start and for when you complete your process.

**Pre-Evaluation Questions (Relational):**

Have you felt connected to your congregation? Why or why not?

Do you belong to a group within the church? How do you connect with people in your

congregation?

What is missing to connect with people in your congregation, if any?

How do you connect best with your fellow church members? Have you made any effort to

connect?

What does this have to do with the way you connect with others outside of your church?



**RESOURCES**

**The Five Finger Prayer**

*This prayer has been around for a while, but several sources say that it was written by Cardinal Bergoglio.*

*It was attributed to him well before he became Pope Francis.*

**1.** The thumb is the closest finger to you. So, start praying for those who are closest to you. They are the people easiest to remember. To pray for our dear ones is a “sweet obligation.”

**2**. The next finger is the index. Pray for those who teach you, instruct you and heal you. They need the support and wisdom to show direction to others. Always keep them in your prayers.

**3.** The following finger is the tallest. It reminds us of our leaders, the governors and those who have authority. They need God’s guidance.

**4.** The fourth finger is the ring finger. Even that it may surprise you, it is our weakest finger. It should remind us to pray for the weakest, the sick or those plagued by problems. They need your prayers.

**5.** And finally we have our smallest finger, the smallest of all. Your pinkie should remind you to pray for yourself. When you are done praying for the other four groups, you will be able to see your own needs but in the proper perspective, and also you will be able to pray for your own needs in a better way.

Diagram

Description automatically generated

**+++**

**I notice…..I wonder……**

**Opening prayer**: Blessed Lord God, you have caused the holy scriptures to be written for the nourishment of your people. Grant that we may hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that, comforted by your promises, we may embrace and forever hold fast to the hope of eternal life, which you have given us in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. *(taken from the ELW pg. 72)*

*As you listen to the reading ponder these phrases*

*I notice……. I wonder…….*

*The goal of this type of engagement with scripture is not to answer each person’s “I notice…I wonder”,*

*but rather to sink deeper into the scripture as you listen to one another.*

**Isaiah 43:1-3a; 16-19**

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. 2When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. 3For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

*I notice……. I wonder….*

I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.  
16Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters,  
17who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior;  
they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:  
18Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.  
19I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert..

# *I notice……. I wonder…..*

Closing Prayer: God Almighty, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: Grant us, we pray, to be grounded and settled in your truth by the coming of the Holy Spirit into our hearts. That which we know not, reveal; that which is wanting, fill up; that which we know, confirm, and keep us blameless in your service; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. *(taken from the ELW pg. 86)*

 From the blogsite The Fertile Unknown, Michelle James, Creativity ^& Emergence Catalyst, Consultant and Coach

**+++**

**MAPPING YOUR COMMUNITY FOR MISSION**….



1. Draw a map of your community. Locate on it:

* What God is up to in the community – resources, programs, institutions, organizations, agencies etc. which serve God’s children
* Areas of “social contrast” – wealthier neighborhoods vs. mobile homes, new strip malls vs. empty older or downtown stores, etc.
* Gathering places – business, social, religious, entertainment, cultural, educational, etc.
* Frequently traveled streets/roads/bridges vs. almost deserted places

1. In your group, look at your map and discuss what you see. Prayer for guidance from God to show you where you are being called.
2. Answer the following questions together:

* What issue or challenge could God be calling you to engage in within your community?
* What information would you need to find out in order to make a plan?
* Who would you talk to, what questions would you ask?
* How would you use this information to make a plan? How could you ensure that the plan turns into action and that the work will continue long-term if needed?

*Taken from ‘Yet Another Path’ for Walking the Way of Jesus, A Companion to Transforming Congregations as They Discern and Live Out God’s Call. Copyright: 2012, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

**+++**

**Community Leader Conversations**

In getting to know the needs and assets of the community, it is often helpful to visit with community leaders such as: school administrators, leaders of social service agencies, administrators of the hospital/clinic, business leaders, government leaders, police officers, fire fighters, pastors, etc.

Following is a list of questions you might want to consider asking community leaders. May God’s Spirit empower you during these visits and as you share the responses with your congregational team for on-going discussion, discernment and planning that leads to action.

* Tell me what you know about our church. Where is it located? What do we do?
* What are the community’s assets?
* What are the community’s needs? Are these needs being met? Where are there gaps?
* Are there any ways that we could partner with you to respond to certain needs in the community?
* What are your perceptions about the number of people who are not connected to a faith community in neighborhood/section of town/among your clients?
* What segment of the population do you serve? What are they like? Tell me about them.
* Five years from now, what do you hope will happen in the community?
* Is there someone else you know that I should visit with and ask these same questions?

**+++**

**Conversations with People in the Neighborhood/Community**

In getting to know the needs of the neighborhood/community it is helpful to visit with individuals in the neighborhood/community. When asked, “How do we know what doors to knock on in a neighborhood?” a community organizer answered, “Look for the flowerpots!” That may sound funny, but it is a good method. When you arrive on a street or neighborhood, look at the houses. The ones with flowerpots in front, or planted flowers, or seasonal decorations probably indicate the people have lived there for a while and plan to stay. It also may indicate that one of their gifts is hospitality and so they may be more willing to talk to you. So don’t knock on every door - just the ones with the ‘flowerpots.”

Here are some questions to ask:

* Tell me what you know about our church. Where is it located? What do we do?
* What things most important in your neighborhood/community?
* What is happening in your neighborhood/community? How should a church respond?
* Why did you come here? What has it been like for you? Have people reached out and been welcoming?
* Are there things going on in the neighborhood/community that make you angry?
* Are there things going on in the neighborhood/community that make you hopeful?
* If you could change one thing about this neighborhood/community, what would it be?
* Who do you see as positive leaders in the community?
* If you want to know something about your neighborhood/community, who do you ask?
* Five years from now, what do you hope will happen in your neighborhood/community?
* What one idea can you share?
* Is there someone else you know that I should visit with and ask these same questions?

**+++**

**Community Leader Conversation Training**

The initial contact:

* Call the leader(s) and set up an appointment to visit.
* Explain that you are a member of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church. “Our congregation is in the process of a self-study. A part of this process is to visit with community leaders as we learn more about the neighborhood and community around us - its needs and its assets.”
* Look at the website of the organization/business/agency – do research – do your homework
* Tell them you would like to meet with them for 30-45 minutes.

The visit:

* Introduce yourself and ask the person to tell you something about them and their role in the business/agency.
* Ask the questions on the handout, but do not be rigid. Ask if it is OK if you take notes if you wish to do so.
* Ask open ended questions
* Listen well and let your next questions flow from what you are hearing.
* This should be a natural conversation as well as an information gathering session.
* One of the goals is to develop a positive relationship with the leader with whom you are meeting.
* If you are given the name of someone else to contact, get their contact information.
* Thank the person for their time before you leave.

Follow-up:

* Summarize the information you gathered from the visit in written form to share with the team later.
* Send a thank you note or email to the leader with whom you visited.

**+++**

**Outreach Ideas**

* As a welcome gift to guests at worship, give them a jar of sundae topping. Put this message on the jar: “Thanks for worshipping with us! You made our Sunday! Now let us help you make your next Sundae!” –OR— Send visitors home with a loaf of bread and a note in the package quoting Jesus, ‘I am the bread of life’ (John 6:35). Express the hope that the guest has been well-fed and will return to eat again.
* Make simple door hangers. Print on them the following: Worship times for Holy Week and Easter. Add clip art of an empty Easter basket with this slogan: “Is your Easter basket a little empty this year? Fill it with the love of Jesus.” Gather a group and canvas the town hanging them on every house door. No verbal invitation is necessary, so this is a non-threatening way to invite others to worship.
* On a cold winter’s day, take your youth group or other group to the neighborhood grocery store. Outside of the store, distribute hot chocolate, free of charge. Print labels and put on the cups: “Jesus warms your heart.” On a spring day, take a group to a busy intersection in your town. Distribute seed packets of flowers or vegetables, free of charge. Print labels and put on the seed packets: “God Bless You. May your faith grow like the seeds in the springtime.” Add the name of your church and worship times.
* Equip members to invite people to worship and other events by supplying them with business cards containing information about the church. Invite each member to use these cards as invitations whenever opportunities present themselves Remember to include the congregation’s website address if it has one.
* Host a “Sunday in the Park.” Have a worship service, followed by a meal, and then invite musicians from the congregation and community to continue to entertain during and after the meal. It can be an exciting time of music and fellowship.
* Participate in local events. Make a float for a parade, have a bake sale at a community celebration, support the local booster club, volunteer at the local nursing home, sponsor a team in the local basketball or volleyball league. Open your building to community events and groups (i.e., scouts, 4-H, AA). Each time a person enters your church building, there is an opportunity for outreach and building relationships.
* Reach out to seasonal visitors in creative and intentional ways. Send out flyers to ‘boxholder’ and offer a ‘coupon’ for a free cup of coffee. Put brochures in area resorts, motels, grocery stores, and campgrounds.
* Invite people to experience the gathered faith community by intentionally scheduling ‘friendship’ or ‘welcome’ Sundays; fellowship activities, such as dinner theater or corn roast; youth and family activities; sports events or teams; and community classes. Call it “Bring a Friend Sunday” or “Pop-In Sunday”. Rent a commercial popcorn popper and ‘fire it up’ so the smell of popcorn fills the building and give each worshipper a bag of popcorn to enjoy during worship.
* Do not have enough children to put on a Christmas program at your church? Why not try having a community Christmas pageant in cooperation with the other churches in your community. Advertise it as a ‘drama production’ and perhaps you’ll have the opportunity to include unchurched children and youth, as well. Include a soup supper and have it in a public space outside the church and start a new and meaningful Christmas tradition for your community.
* Take breakfast to the workers at businesses in your communities. Choose 3-4 businesses per month. Deliver sweet rolls, muffins, etc. and attach a note thanking them for serving your community. Make this an even more powerful outreach by praying with the people at the business when you deliver the goodies.
* How many children come to Sunday School in your church and how many children could be coming to Sunday School? Increase Sunday School attendance by matching each child with an adult ‘Church Buddy’. Encourage them to exchange notes, emails, text messages and phone calls. Adults can offer the children a ride to Sunday School, sit with them in church, and encourage faithful attendance.

**+++**

**ACTIVITIES**

**Taking Risks Activity**

Beginning something new, doing things in new ways, creating a Missional ethos – all of this involves change, exploration, experimentation and taking risks.

How many of you are risk takers?

Distribute fortune cookies with scripture verse in them. You can order these from Oriental Trading Co.

Have participants volunteer, and then stand up and read their fortune to the group.

Remember the thought that you were holding – If we know what is at the end of a risk, then it is not a risk.

You do know what, or rather who, is at the end of every risk that you take – God/Jesus.

And not only is God/Jesus at the end, but at the beginning, and in the middle, and every step along the way.

As you discern what God is calling you to do, as you develop the purpose and guiding principles for your congregation, God is going to lead you into new ways of mission and ministry, exploring, experimenting, taking risks. You can move forward because God is with you, every step.

Does this mean that you will never fail? Probably not, we are human, we fail…..but when we fail we fall right into the arms of God….and that is not a bad place to be.

The God I know, let’s me rest for a while and then plops me back up on my feet and gives me a little shove and tells me to get moving…..living out my baptismal call, accomplishing what God is calling me to do, living out the congregations purpose and guiding principles.

*Please note: Fortune Cookies are available from Oriental Trading – Bible Verse Fortune Cookies – Item # IN-/K365*

**+++**

**Identifying Your Faith Stories**

When asked to share a faith story, do you ever wonder if you actually have a faith story? Chances are you have many faith stories. A faith story is simply an encounter with God. These encounters with our amazing God can happen……through an exchange with another person, through what one might call a coincidence, through a vision or dream, through that still small voice whispering within you, through happenings that come together in a way that makes you shake your head and smile, through nature, and other ways. Below are thought starters to help you identify your faith stories. After you have identified one of your faith stories you will be given a chance to share it one-on-one with another person. Don’t worry if you get emotional while sharing, encounters with a God as magnificent, gracious, powerful and merciful as our God IS emotional. What a privilege to identify these stories and tell them. May the Holy Spirit empower you as you discover and share.

Tell about a time when you didn’t think you could have made it through a situation if God had not been there to bring you through it.

Tell about a time when you felt God very close to you…right there present with you.

Tell about a time when you heard God speaking to you through another person or a situation.

Tell about a time when you experienced God’s angels watching over you or guiding you.

Tell about a special time of prayer that you had with God.

Tell about a time when you were really worried about someone or something. How did you feel God’s presence?

Tell about a time when you knew God was enabling you to use your God-given gifts to bless someone.

Tell about a time of forgiveness or reconciliation. How was God involved?

Tell about a time that you were frightened or afraid. How was God involved?

Tell about a time when the Holy Spirit was empowering you to do something.

Tell about a time when you created a new thing, idea, event, artwork, writing, etc.

How was God involved?

**+++**

**Sharing Your Faith Story and/or Inviting Others**

The Holy Spirit gives us opportunities every day to share our faith and/or to invite someone to meet Jesus in or through us or our congregation. Many of these opportunities are occasions for ‘planting seeds. How and if these seeds grow is the work of the Spirit. However, we have the privilege of being the sowers. In our daily conversations, we can respond in common, ordinary ways or we can respond in ways that sow seeds. The challenge is to think before we respond. As you are considering the conversations below, create responses which include words like, “God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, faith, blessing, prayer, church, etc.”

**Scene**: You are sitting in a doctor’s office, and you strike up a conversation with the person next to you. She says to you, “I am worried about my little boy. He just hasn’t felt well for a long time.” What is your response?

**Scene**: It’s Monday morning at work and a co-worker asks you what you did over the weekend that was fun. What is your response?

**Scene**: You are visiting with some co-workers, and they invite you to go see a movie after work. You are tempted to go out with them, but you would rather go home and spend some time with your family. What is your response?

**Scene**: A neighbor has not been feeling well or has just arrived home from the hospital, so you take some food over to their house. They invite you in to visit for a few minutes. In the conversation, the person says to you, “It is so nice of you to bring this food.” What is your response?

**Scene**: Your child has a friend over for supper and you bow your heads to pray. When you are finished, the friend asks, “Why do you pray? We don’t do that at my house.” What is your response?

**Scene**: A friend says that she/he has not gone to church for a long time. In fact, they are mad at God, feeling that God has abandoned them. What is your response?

**Scene**: Someone overhears you talking about going to the Lutheran Church and asks, “What is a Lutheran?” What is your response?

**+++**

**Begin with Assets Activity**

* Take a jar that is bigger at the bottom than at the top.
* First, put foam balls in the jar. Seven foam balls represent things in the congregation that are not helpful (i.e. – we never did it that way before, we are small, we don’t have enough people, you are asking us to change, etc.)
* Second, put handfuls of small, wrapped candy (such as individually wrapped lifesavers or tootsie rolls) in the jar. Candy represents assets that a congregation has (i.e., people, building, gifts, God, etc.)
* Fill jar with the candy and put lid on jar.
* What went in first? Things which are not helpful. What went in second? Assets.
* Pour everything out of the jar.
* Now put in the candy first. What are the assets that we named?
* Then put in the foam balls. The foam balls will not all fit and if they do, you cannot put the lid on.
* Conclusion – start with assets, focus on assets and then there is not enough room for those things which are not helpful.
* When we are planning a project/activity/ministry/new venture……we always begin with what we have and not with what we do not have. This is called asset-based thinking.

**+++**

**Discovering Assets Activity**

**(Speed Dating Style)**

This exercise is a fun, energetic way to discover assets and deepen relationships in the congregation.

**Supplies needed:**

* Small pieces of paper (1/8 of a sheet of paper) – *you need one piece for each question per person (i.e. if you are asking 8 questions and there are 20 people, you need 160 small pieces of paper)*
* A pen for each person
* A basket for the middle of each table
* One to two flip charts with markers
* Long or round tables with an even number of chairs around the table.
* A timer or cell phone to time one minute

**Instructions:**

To begin the activity, each person partners up with someone else. One person of the pair is a ‘1’ and the other person is a ‘2’. The 1’s always sit in the same chair throughout the activity. The 2’s move to a new chair and pair up with another “1” after each question (therefore they have a new partner).

The leader asks a question from the list below. Be sure to include the number of the question (i.e., the first question is #1, the second #2, etc.) The leader sets the timer for one minute. Each partner quickly writes their name, the number of the question and their answer on a small piece of paper and throws it in the basket in the middle of the table; then each person shares their answer with their partner. When the timer goes off, all conversation ends.

The leader goes to the flip chart paper and writes the title of the question on the paper (i.e. Significant Gift) and asks everyone to shout out what their partner has said to them. The leader records the answers on the big paper. Please note, if you are working with a large group, you may want to have 2 or 3 flip charts and 2 or 3 people recording answers.

After all answers are recorded on the flip chart, the 2’s move to a new chair to pair up with a a different #1; the next question is asked and the process is repeated.

Ideally it is good to use Post-it note flip charts, so the sheets of paper can be put up around the room. After all questions have been answered, take time to look at all the assets that have been recorded. Amazing! God has blessed us richly!! Invite people to walk around and look at all that has been recorded. What might we do with all of these assets? Take time to do some brainstorming.

At the end of the activity, the small pieces of paper in the baskets are gathered and a volunteer takes them home and compiles the results for future use. It is important that as the responses are tabulated the name of the person giving that response is also a part of the tabulated list.

I believe this statement is true: God has given you everything you need in order to do what God is calling you to do. The goal is to use this list to identify leaders and volunteers who might be excited to engage in a particular activity/ministry/project that is being developed by someone in the congregation. It also will provide a compass as your congregation discerns how to respond to community needs. For example – if there is a need for an afterschool program, but no one in the congregation has the gifts needed for this, then this program should not be pursued.

Please note that as people change partners and join in a short conversation, relationships are being deepened, an added by-product of this activity.

**Questions:** (*Hint: Do not use all of these questions…..depending on the time allotted for the activity 7-8 questions is plenty.)*

What is your most significant gift?

What is your most significant skill?

What is your most significant passion?

What is your most significant artistic ability?

What is your most significant spiritual gift?

What is something you like to do?

What is something you used to like to do?

What is something others say you’re good at?

What is a material asset you can share?

What do you have a lot of?

What musical instrument can you play?

What is it that you know well enough that you could teach to someone?

Who is a person outside your congregation who owes you a favor or would do you a favor if you ask (what is their skill/experience)?

What is invisibly good about this congregation?

What is an asset of your church building?

**+++**

**FROG – Fully Rely on God**

* Let us pray…Into your hands, almighty God, we place ourselves: our minds to know you, our hearts to love you, our wills to serve you, for we are yours. Into your hands, incarnate Savior we place ourselves: receive us and draw us after you, that we may follow your steps; abide in us and enliven us by the power of your indwelling. Into your hand, O hovering Spirit, we place ourselves: take us and fashion us after your image; let your comfort strengthen, your grace renew, and your fire cleanse us, soul and body, in life and in death, in this world of shadows and in your changeless world of light eternal, now and forever. Amen. *(taken from ELW pg. 86)*
* In the end, congregational renewal and all we do in mission and ministry is all about FROG – Fully Rely on God
* Psalm 33:20-22 (The Message)

We’re depending on God; he’s everything we need. What’s more, our hearts brim with joy since we’ve taken for our own his holy name. Love us, God with all you’ve got – that’s what we’re depending on.

* Fling the frogs!!!

*Please note: Frogs available from Oriental Trading – Stretchable Flying Frogs – Item # IN-12/2031*

**Post-Evaluation Questions (Relational):**

What will you do now to connect with others in your congregation?

How will this change relationships within your congregation? Within the greater community?

If this step has been problematic, how will you evaluate yourself or your congregation?



[This Photo](https://www.comicbookdaily.com/collecting-community/collecting-and-investing-tips/collecting-and-investing-tips-20/) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/)

**Congregational Visioning**

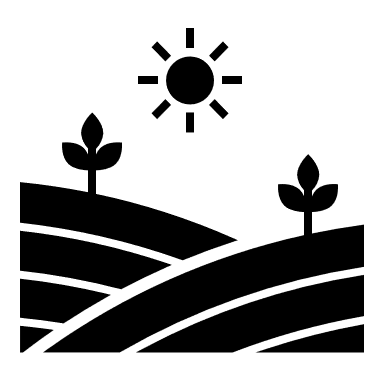
A picture containing text, sign, outdoor

Description automatically generated

In this session you’ll re-discover God’s mission for your congregations and to re-root congregations in the communities you’ve been planted to be about God’s mission. In addition, you could reflect on your congregation’s next journey.



Conversations: Visioning planning



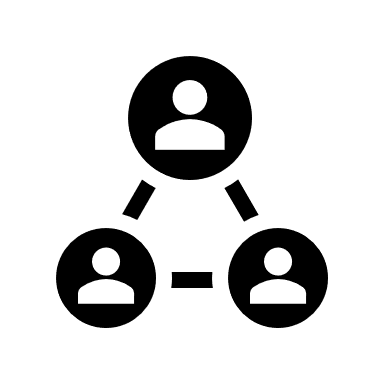
Anchor Church Models



Merging



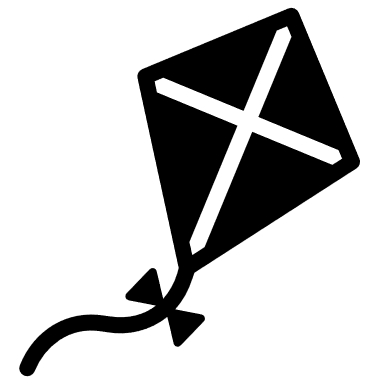
Consolidating



Shared Ministry



Ten Models of Ministries



Resources

**Pre-evaluation questions**

When was the last time you did an outreach project within the church?

Who is your community and how are you involved?

If you could do anything in the community, what would you do?

What do people say about your community, are there thoughts on it?



***Conversations: Visioning planning***

1. **Discovering Your Congregation’s Future and Celebrating the past. This conversation is based on five questions**

1. What is our congregation’s purpose/role in God’s mission?

2. What is our congregation’s story?

3. Who are our neighbors?

4. Who are we?

5. How is God calling us to respond?

1. **Congregational Vitality Survey**

A vital congregation is one that lives out God’s mission through strong relationships with God, each other and the world. The following questions can help your congregation determine its current vitality (mission orientation).

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Poorly** |  | **Somewhat** |  | **Great** |  |
| **How well do these phrases describe your congregation?** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | Copy number from  column |
| *Example* |  |  | *X* |  |  | *3* |
| Worship nurtures people’s faith |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Deepens people’s relationship with God |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| A clear sense of mission |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Excitement about the congregation’s future |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Always ready to try something new |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| A positive force in the community |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Works for social justice/advocacy |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **How well does your congregation…** | **Hardly at all** |  | **Well** |  | **Very Well** |  |
| Incorporate new members into congregational life |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Seek out and use the gifts of members of all ages |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Build strong, healthy relationships  among members |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Manage disagreements in a healthy, respectful manner |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Address social concerns (helping those in need) |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Equip members to share their faith with others |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Interact with the local community |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Help members live out their faith in their daily lives |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Total all rows | | | | | |  |
| **Vitality Score: (Divide total by 15)** | | | | | |  |

# **Balancing Vitality and Sustainability**

Table

Description automatically generatedUse the following chart to mark where your congregation falls in the matrix. Find your sustainability at the bottom and draw a line up. Find your vitality score from the first page and draw a line to the right. Look at where the two lines cross. This intersection **estimates** your congregation’s most likely vitality/sustainability balance. This is not a perfect measure because these categories overlap some in real life. **Talk about how this estimate fits or doesn’t fit with your experience and why.**

A congregation needs to be both vital and sustainable in order to be thriving. Vital congregations that aren’t sustainable can’t continue God’s mission in their setting. Sustainable congregations that are not vital may have lost touch with God’s mission for them in this time and place. **What are your congregation’s strengths and challenges? What is God calling your congregation toward now?**

*Questionnaire for Congregations to evaluate themselves, contact*[**irma@ntnl.org**](mailto:irma@ntnl.org)

1. **A Season for Prayer and Renewal: Seeking a New Vision and Mission.**

This resource offers congregations several flexible options for use in observing **A Season of Prayer and Renewal.** These options are intended to facilitate prayer, reflection and conversation in a spirit of attentiveness as we seek fresh visions for living out a sense of purpose in God’s mission. Congregations may choose one or more of the following options or modify or add options in relation to the theme:

* **Prayer Petitions**
* **Weekly Sunday or Midweek** worship plan
* **Read the Bible**, a plan for having every member read the Book of Acts
* **Prayer Experiment and Re-Rooting in God’s Mission**, two more resources
* **Appendix**, describing the prayer practices commended in this resource

# **Prayer Petitions**



These prayer petitions, or ones like them, may be used in regular Sunday morning worship or in every Sunday or midweek worship services. These petitions could also be used before or during council, board or committee meetings.

*Almighty God, your mission is to redeem the world. Inspire us by your Holy Spirit with passion and courage so we can join you in that work. Open our eyes to see you moving in our community. Open our ears to hear your call. Open our hearts to love our neighbors. Open our minds to imagine new ways of sharing the good news about Jesus in the world.*

*Holy and Loving God, your mission is to redeem the world. Renew us by your Holy Spirit during these 40 days of prayer, so that we have the courage to join you in that work. Open our eyes to what is broken in our communities, open our ears to hear the cry of those in need, open our hearts to our neighbors who do not know you, open our imagination to new ways of serving you.*

*Jesus Christ, you are the same yesterday, today and forever. Lord, we praise you for your constancy during these turbulent times in our culture and church. During these 40 days give us the courage to seek your vision for the future of our congregation. Open our eyes and ears and hearts to discover your will for our church.*

*Lord, you reign in the past, the present, and the future. During these 40 days help us to discover your purpose for us in this new day. . ..*

# **Weekly Sunday and/or Midweek Worship**

Printed below is an outline for weekly and/or midweek worship services that focus on discovering God’s mission for your congregation. Pastors, rostered leaders, worship planning committees, and small groups might consider using the following order of worship, biblical texts, discussion questions, and prayer practices in worship services during the 40-day time period that has been set.



**SUGGESTED ORDER OF WORSHIP**

* Invocation
* Hymn/song (use familiar, easy-to-sing music)
* Prayer (use one of the prayer petitions listed above in this resource)
* Read Bible passage assigned for the week
* Discussion groups in the pews using the questions provided
* Sharing of “God sighting” stories
* Prayer together (using the “prayer starter” questions in the resource or other questions that arise from your reflection)
* Prayer practice review and preview (a time to equip disciples for using, on a daily basis, the prayer practices discussed in the Appendix to this resource)
* Blessing/benediction
* Sending hymn (again, familiar, comfortable)



**SUGGESTED WEEKLY REFLECTION MATERIAL**

Please note that the Appendix offers fuller explanations and suggestions for using the prayer practices of *Examen, Lectio Divina* and the sharing of “God sighting” stories.

### Week 1, Exodus 3:1-12. God speaks to Moses via a burning bush. LISTEN

* **Discussion questions:** What is God doing in this Bible reading? How does this Bible reading relate to your congregation or community? What might God be saying to you through this Bible reading?
* **Prayer petition:** How does your church need God’s help? How do you need God’s help?
* **Faith practice to exercise during the week: Examen-Discernment**
* **“God sighting” story sharing**

### Week 2, Ezekiel 37:1-14. Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones. LOOK

* **Discussion questions:** What is God doing in this Bible reading? How does this Bible reading relate to your congregation or community? What might God be saying to you through this Bible reading?
* **Prayer petition:** What looks “dry” in your congregation? What new life do you seek from God?
* **Faith practice to exercise during the week: Examen-Discernment**
* **“God sighting” story sharing**

### Week 3, Luke 10:1-24. Jesus Sends Out 70 Disciples. RESPOND

* **Discussion questions:** What is God doing in this Bible reading? How does this Bible reading relate to your congregation or community? What might God be saying to you through this Bible reading?
* **Prayer petition:** Where is God sending your congregation? How is your congregation responding to Jesus’ call?
* **Faith practice to exercise during the week: Examen-Discernment**
* **“God sighting” story sharing**

### Week 4, Luke 15. Finding the Lost. FORGIVE

* **Discussion questions:** What is God doing in this Bible reading? How does this Bible reading relate to your congregation or community? What might God be saying to you through this Bible reading?
* **Prayer petition:** Who is “lost” in your community? To whom is God calling your congregation to announce God’s gracious forgiveness?
* **Faith practice to exercise during the week: Examen-Discernment**
* **“God sighting” story sharing**

### Week 5, Matthew 22:34-40. The Great Commandment. LOVE

* **Discussion questions:** What is God doing in this Bible reading? How does this Bible reading relate to your congregation? What might God be saying to you through this Bible reading?
* **Prayer petition:** How does your congregation love God? How do the disciples in your congregation love their neighbors?
* **Faith practice to exercise during the week: Examen-Discernment**
* **“God sighting” story sharing**

### Week 6, Matthew 28. The Great Commission. GO

* **Discussion questions:** What is God doing in this Bible reading? How does this Bible reading relate to your congregation or community? What might God be saying to you through this Bible reading?
* **Prayer petition:** What is the Risen Lord Jesus Christ commissioning your congregation to do?
* **Faith practice to exercise during the week: Examen-Discernment**
* **“God sighting” story sharing**

A yellow sunflower in front of a church

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

### HYMN IDEAS

*Be Thou My Vision* - ELW #793, *We All Are One in Mission* - ELW #576, *Here I Am, Lord* - ELW #574, *I Love to Tell the Story* – ELW #661, *The Spirit Sends Us Forth to Serve - ELW* #551, *We Are Called* - ELW #720, *O Zion, Haste* - ELW #668, *This Little Light of Mine* - ELW #677, *Lord You Give the Great Commission* - ELW #579

***A Season of Prayer for Change***

# Read the Bible

Encourage all disciples in your faith community to read through the book of Acts during a 40-day time period that your congregation has set. Use the practice of praying the scriptures (*Lectio Divina,* described in the Appendix to this resource) or

the reflection questions listed below for dwelling in the scriptures.

Read through selected scripture readings using *Lectio Divina* or the following set of questions:

* + What is God doing in this story?
  + What is God saying to me through this story?
  + What is God saying to us (our congregation) through this story?
  + What are we hearing God ask us (our congregation) to do through this story?

Another option would be to gather a small group of key leaders and innovators in the congregation to “dwell in the scripture”; discuss and pray together to discover the congregation’s purpose; and explore ways your congregation might participate more deeply in God’s mission in your local context during this Season of Prayer and Renewal.



**A Plan for Reading through the Book of Acts in 40 days:**

Day 1 Acts 1:1-11

Day 2 Acts 1:12-26

Day 3 Acts 2:1-13

Day 4 Acts 2:14-42

Day 5 Acts 2:43-47

Day 6 Acts 3:1-26

Day 7 Acts 4:1-12

Day 8 Acts 4:13-37

Day 9 Acts 5:1-11

Day 10 Acts 5:12-42

Day 11 Acts 6:1-7

Day 12 Acts 7:1-60

Day 13 Acts 8:1-40

Day 14 Acts 9:1-31

Day 15 Acts 9:32-42

Day 16 Acts 10:1-48

Day 17 Acts 11:1-30

Day 18 Acts 12:1-25

Day 19 Acts 13:1-12

Day 20 Acts 13:13-42

Day 21 Acts 13:43-53

Day 22 Acts 14:1-28

Day 23 Acts 15:1-35

Day 24 Acts 15:36-16:15

Day 25 Acts 16:16-40

Day 26 Act 17:1-14

Day 27 Acts 17:15-34

Day 28 Acts 18:1-17

Day 29 Acts 18:18-28

Day 30 Acts 19

Day 31 Acts 20

Day 32 Acts 21

Day 33 Acts 22

Day 34 Acts 23

Day 35 Acts 24

Day 36 Acts 25

Day 37 Acts 26

Day 38 Act 27

Day 39 Acts 28:1-15

Day 40 Acts 28:16-31

**Prayer Experiment**

In addition to any of the ideas mentioned previously in this resource, you might try this experiment. Send the pastor and several members of the congregation and/or the church council out individually to the local coffee shop or café, to sit on a park bench, sit in their car in the grocery store parking lot, hang out at the library, post office, or any public place and pray this simple prayer: “*Lord, help me to see what you see.”* After listening prayerfully for one hour, they should reconvene to share what they heard. This simple outing may open the eyes and hearts of some to see God’s mission in their community or rural context and imagine new ways to enter into that mission.

# **Appendix**

**Prayer Practices Resources for Use with *A Season for Prayer and Renewal***

### Prayer of Examen

**(This explanation draws on explanations from the book*, Leading a Life With God* by Daniel Wolpert)**

The key to understanding the examen as a practice of discernment is to see how looking backward to identify the movement of God can lead to being guided by God into the future. The examen asks us to look back over a period of time or review an event looking for glimmers, moments, and actions that appear to be either “of God” or not “of God.” The former are life-giving things that bring fruits of the Spirit, while the later are life-denying, life- squelching and not of God’s Spirit. Over time the examen begins to reveal clear patterns in God’s action. We notice God’s presence and action in what is life-giving and we notice those kinds of actions move us in certain directions.

**Recal**l that you are in God’s presence.

**Return** thanks to God for the gifts of the day.

Ask God to **reveal** the truth as you look at your actions and attitudes with honesty and patience.

**Review** the day or some period of time in your life or in the life of your congregation. Allow your mind to wander through that period of time - look for times of joy, peace, movement toward God, sorrow for sin, charity toward others (consolation). Look for times of unrest, darkness of the soul, sadness, thoughts that lead away from God, self centeredness (desolation). Some questions you might ask yourself about that period include:

*What are you most/least grateful for during that time? What felt life-giving? What felt life-draining?*

*When did you feel a sense of love, peace, joy, life (the gifts of the Spirit)? When did you feel exhausted, dead, drained, angry, mean?*

*What specific events, thoughts, or experiences draw your attention? What aspects of that time repel you?*

Ask yourself*, “When did I notice God during this time? What felt like a time of God’s absence?”*

As some answers to these questions arise, notice what they suggest to you about the future, for you, for your congregation. How is God calling you, your congregation into being? Toward what actions, activities, or attributes is God drawing you, your congregation?

**React and respond** to Jesus personally, putting into words your heart’s desire, asking for forgiveness, strength and hope to confront desolations and give thanks for consolations.

### Lectio Divina: a Slow, Contemplative Praying of the Scriptures

Read (Lectio)-slowly-quiet down in order to hear God’s word; gently listen for a word or phrase that draws your attention - this is God’s word for you this day; listen deeply to hear with the ears of your heart God’s still, small voice.

Meditation (Meditatio)-take the word in and ruminate on it, to ponder it in your heart, repeat it over and over again, internalize the word, a word that touches us and affects us at our deepest level. What thoughts and images arise for you?

Prayer (Oratio)-dialogue with God and offer to God our whole selves, allowing ourselves to be touched and changed by God. What might God be saying to you, may be calling you to do through your prayerful reflection on this reading?

Contemplation (Contemplatio)-silently rest in the presence of God and accept God’s transforming grace. Wordless, quiet rest in the presence of the One who loves us. Enjoy the experience of being in the presence of God.



**Group Reading and Reflection:**

1. Begin with a time of silent prayer (about 30 – 60 seconds). Into the

silence a group leader slowly reads this passage through two times, with a pause between, while everyone pays attention to a word or phrase that particularly gets their attention, strikes them, draws their interest. Don’t be caught by the literal meaning of the scripture. Rather, listen for the word or phrase that catches your attention. Silently focus on that word or phrase. Allow it to sift through your heart and mind. After the second reading, the reader should allow some silent time for this reflection.

1. Each person, then, without elaboration or conversation, is invited to share their word (yes, it is an option to “pass” and not share a word or phrase if one is not comfortable doing so; that is fine). There is no right or wrong here, it is simply the word or phrase each person is drawn to.
2. The group leader reads the passage a third time.
   * The group members are invited to listen for how God is speaking to them through the passage. They might also listen for possibilities of how God might be speaking to the church council or to the congregation through the passage.
   * After a time of silence, group members are invited to share what they have heard in this phase of the prayer.

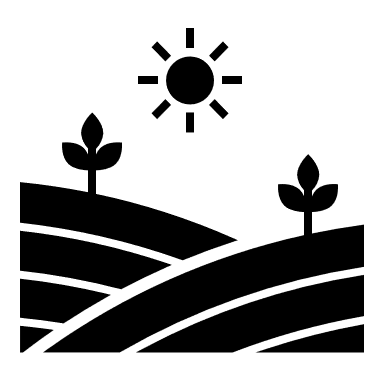
*In the group process, it is important that group members not comment on one another’s observations but simply listen during the sharing period.*

**“God Sightings” – Sharing Stories**

Where have you noticed God’s presence in your life, in your family, your place of work, in your community, in your congregation in the past day, week, year? Your responses to these questions are “God sightings” as that term is used in this resource.

Here are some good God questions:

* What is making God smile in this situation?
* What is breaking God’s heart right now?
* What is God dreaming about?
* What is God paying attention to that God is calling me/us to pay attention to?
* Where has God’s presence been strongly experienced, felt in our lives, in the life of our congregation in the past? Are there clues there about where God’s presence might be experienced strongly in the future, maybe in similar, but also somewhat new ways?
* If God’s mission is to bless the world and our mission is to get in on what God is doing, what opportunities are we seeing out there where God seems to be doing something, inviting us to do something?



***Anchor Church Models***

**“Moving from Struggling to Strength”**

**A Strategy for Revitalization for Anchor Churches with Multi-site Ministries**

*Reflections by Pastor Scott Suskovic, Christ Lutheran Church in Charlotte, NC*

**The Vision**

To assist struggling congregations with high potential for regaining a vibrant ministry as well as to launch new mission sites with a higher degree of success and impact.

**The Reality:**

The landscape for congregations has changed dramatically over the past generation and the Church has been slow to respond. Mission starts have had lackluster success and smaller churches have dramatically shrunk in size. For example, half of the churches in the North Carolina Synod now worship 50 people or fewer. The average worship attendance for an ELCA congregation is below 109 per Sunday and decreasing every year. This has resulted in many congregations existing in isolation, struggling to survive.

We believe that we can revitalize many struggling, smaller congregations through a partnership with a medium/large congregation called an “anchor church.” Mission starts and restarts that are yoked with larger, vibrant congregations have a much higher success rate of developing a thriving ministry than going alone.

This is due to:

1. The synergy of partnering with a larger staff to think creatively, receive consultation and share resources.
2. The cost sharing of staff including bookkeeping, membership record keeping, graphic designs, social media, secretarial support, musicians and youth/family workers to reduce duplication
3. The development of lay and professional staff for a more effective shared mutual ministry

**Various Models**

To address these issues of helping struggling churches as well as beginning new mission starts, there are several models that have been used from “parachute drops” to church mergers. Historically, these have had mixed results. In their excellent book entitled, Better Together, authors Jim Tomberlin and Warren Bird provide a compelling overview of these failed strategies and provide a healthy alternative to moving forward. They lift up the various models that have been tried over the years, pointing out the pitfalls and the benefits of each approach. The traditional model of the “parachute drop” has proven to have the least success in terms of long-term viability. The next least successful strategy is a merger between two struggling congregations. In such a strategy, unfortunately, neither struggling congregation is able to provide the vision, leadership or the resources to make this merger a success. Alternatively, when there is a merger of two equal, medium size congregations that choose to unite, it also has a low success rate because of the conflict between blending their individual and separate sense of history, buildings, culture and traditions into a single congregation.

In their research, by far the best and most successful mergers were the result of what we are calling “anchor churches.” These anchor churches unite with either a struggle church or launch a new start and provide the vision, resources, leadership and proven track record to take the lead in making these mergers a success. These mergers have the highest success rate and measurable growth than any other model.

There are several variations for these anchor church mergers to succeed. All of these could work either by merging with an existing, struggling church or ministry as well as launching a new site. Congregations will have to choose which model best fits with their vision, temperament and relationships with the anchor church.

1. **The Franchise Model (Pastor Rusty Sullivan, Faith Lutheran, Flower Mound, Texas)**

This model, often used by mega-churches, creates various sites that look and smell and taste exactly like one another. They have the same worship, the same branding, the same feel and typically have the same sermon streamed into all the various sites.

1. **The Poly-site Mission Community (Pastor Jonathan Heierman, Calvary Lutheran, Clarkston, Michigan)**

This model is similar to a mini synod in which a variety of ministry expressions and approaches are interdependent and unified around the anchor church by a common DNA of mission, vision and values. Sites may vary in the degree of unity and independence they have while creating a partnership in terms of providing service in the community (homeless shelter, counseling services, community orchard or park) and/or shared programs for

its members (small groups, youth groups or confirmation classes). Furthermore, these sites may be worshiping communities but are not limited to congregations. The anchor church could initiate or unite with various ministries such as a community garden, a counseling center or a senior housing development. The anchor church provides the vision, resources and leadership that unite the variety of sites. Staffing, governance, and management are overseen by the anchor church, while various financial streams are developed to fund the variety of ministries.  
 **The Coaching Model (Pastor Doug Hill, Abiding Hope, Littleton, Colorado)**

In this example, struggling churches partner with vibrant ones for a season. They remain independent but come alongside a healthy church for a time of coaching and encouragement until they regain their stability. At that time, the goal is for them to dissolve the partnership so that they can multiple this model and become a coaching site for others

This coaching model also applies to using anchor churches to launch new worshipping sites to provide them the leadership, members, resources and vitality to begin strong with the intention of making them independent within 3-5 years.

1. **The Adoption Model (Pastor Scott Suskovic, Christ Lutheran, Charlotte, North Carolina)**

Just as a family is united in being together but maintain their unique personalities, the adoption model provides a balance between autonomy and unity. In this model, congregations that merge share the same mission, budget, staff, council, resources and membership as the anchor church but allow for room in expressing that at different sites in terms of programming, worship and service.

**The Goal:**

We have seen each of these models work. The goal, therefore, is to provide resources and coaching to congregations throughout the country to select what model best fits their context either in merging with struggling churches or launching a new site. This can be done with medium and large congregations taking the lead to rethink the church less as an institution and more as a movement that reaches people, transforms lives and makes an impact for the Kingdom of God.

**

**Merging**

**A merger** is when two or more congregations move together into one of the existing buildings and share resources. In many cases, a merger allows two struggling congregations to share one pastor and to pool dwindling resources, enabling a continued presence in a community.

**Challenges of merging into an existing building include**:

turf issues of “whose” congregation it is

questions about which pastor remains as leader of the merged congregations

feelings of one congregation *winning* and the other *losing*

power struggles

no new sense of mission or energy

****Consolidating**

**A consolidation** is when two or more congregations sell their buildings, change their leadership, and move to a new location with a new sense of ministry and usually a new congregation name.   
  
**Advantages of a consolidation include:**

elimination of turf wars

a new location with new pastoral leadership can often give two or more former congregations a fresh start

budgets, buildings and resources are consolidated for one mission

a new church building can help to launch a new sense of ministry and mission

****Ten models of cooperative ministry**

Pastoral Charge – aka yoking or multiple-point parish. This is constitutional language for two or more congregations that enter into a formal arrangement to share the services of a pastor. Each congregation retains its own incorporation, but also participates in a parish council to discuss issues of concern to the parish as a whole.

Shared Ministry – this is the next generation descendant of the Union Church. Two congregations of different denominations share a building and a pastor, but each congregation retains its own membership role and denominational identity.

Federated Church – a cooperative ministry among congregations from different denominational roots that have come together constitutionally as one congregation with one membership role. The congregation is affiliated with both original denominations.

Cluster or Coalition – two of more independent congregations, often with similar geography or needs, that pool resources to engage in common ministries. Sometimes the projects of cluster congregations are oriented toward members, like a joint confirmation ministry, VBS, or seniors ministry. Sometimes projects are outward focused, like beginning a community center. This is a weak form of cooperation, since it has little intentionality and often does not go deeper than the level of the ministry leaders and must be reinvented as people come and go.

Church-to-Church Partnerships – a clustering of congregations from different areas or differing demographics that make a commitment to work together so that each can benefit from what the other has to offer, e.g., an urban/suburban partnership.

Merger – when one congregation gives up its identity and becomes part of another, continuing congregation. When the receiving congregation is much larger than the uniting congregation, this is sometimes referred to as an “Absorption Merger”.

Consolidation – when two or more congregations join together to form a new entity with a new name and a new congregation ID number. I.e., all entities participating in the consolidation cease to exist in their former identity and a new entity is born. This is sometimes referred to as a “Rebirth Merger.” WARNING: Without the mindset of rebirth, i.e., if congregations come together simply to have more resources to carry on past traditions, the resulting new entities are prone to continue a path of decline.

Multi-Site Ministry / Satellite Campus - when a thriving congregation either opens a second/third/fourth, etc. campus or takes over formerly independent ministries in other locations. Each site may have its own ministry leader, but worship services from the parent site are broadcast to the satellites.

Churches Planting Churches – in this model, a congregation uses its resources (human and financial) to birth a new congregation that will at some point become independent from the parent congregation.

Church Without Walls – this is an independent congregational entity that does not own property, but enters into a covenant with another entity for worship / program space.

**Congregational Preparation Process for entering into a Cooperative Ministry**

1. Begin with a **visioning process**. For this to be viable in the long run, it must be a faith- based process, not a last-ditch survival strategy. NOTE: This step cannot be rushed!
   * + Prepare the soil through faith-building exercises revolving around questions such as “*Who are we as God’s people?”* and “*What does God want us to be doing?”* Resources: **LIVING LUTHERAN** (Dave Daubert), **UNBINDING YOUR SOUL** (Martha Grace Reese).

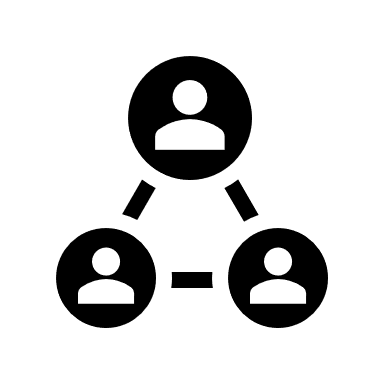
For many congregations, it will be a challenge for folks to move beyond *“What do I want for me and my church?”* to a deeper sense of purpose. Focus on how cooperation is central to the way in which God works in the world.

* + - This can start with the congregation’s leaders and move outward via a town-hall process to the membership as a whole. All the time there should be preaching and teaching revolving around the matter of mission.
    - Be aware that if you are thinking about cooperative ministry mainly because your own congregation is declining, many members will be in denial or will look for some magical solution to turn things around (a dynamic new pastor, a large bequest). Be patient with them, but encourage honest talk and missional thinking.

1. Explore **options**. Play around with different models of cooperative ministry that might positively impact the mission-potential of the congregation. [see "10 Models" document]
2. **Invite** potential **partners** into the conversation (NOTE: your best partners may be ecumenical). At this stage it may be wise to bring your associate of the bishop, the synod DEM, or a consultant into the conversation as an outside voice.
3. **Communicate**, communicate, communicate! Make sure that your members know what you are exploring, why you are exploring it, and how far along you are in your explorations. Use a variety of communication methods.
4. And, once you begin the dance with a potential partner: **Relate**, relate, relate! Plan joint fellowship and worship activities with members of the partnering congregations so folks can get to know and respect each other as people of faith and mission.
5. Eventually, you will develop a **covenant** or “Articles of Agreement” that defines the nature of the cooperation. [see "Covenant for Cooperative Ministries" document]

**Resources for Anchor Church Models**:

* “Developing Cooperative Ministries” – available as a PDF (michael.bennethum@elca.org)
* [www.churchcollaboration.com](http://www.churchcollaboration.com/)
* "God's Ecumenical Ministry, Shared” – available as a PDF (michael.bennethum@elca.org)
* “Spiritual Vitality through Cooperative Ministry,” Diana A. Stephen. Presbyterian Church (USA), 2008.

****SHARED MINISTRY**

**Shared Ministry Models**

church 1

church

3

church

2

Shared Lutheran Ministry of Fayette County uses this type of sharing. Each church is separate for certain ministries. The point they all share is the SLM. But they also have activities and mission that 2 or 3 share. For example, two of the churches have their WELCA meetings together.



satellite

3

satellite

2

Large

church

satellite

1

satellite

4

Satellite Model has one larger church that begins ministries at different sites. The ministries are funded by the larger church. Larger church supplies staff. Ministries could be worshiping sites, social ministry sites like food pantry or counseling, place for youth activities.

**Shared Staff Model** – two or more churches share a pastor or a staff person for specific ministries – youth director, visitation pastor, teacher. The only intersection is sharing cost of the staff person.

Church A

Church B

Pastor/Staff

church

2

church

1

church

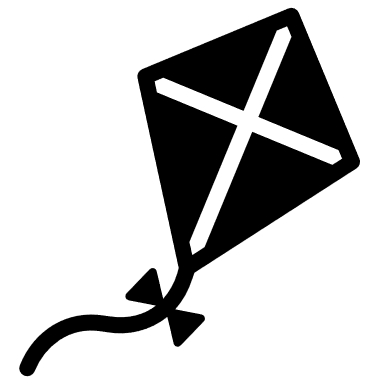
3

shared

ministry

**Shared Program Model** – two or more churches combine resources for a particular ministry – food pantry, nursing home chaplain, Spanish-speaking worship, etc.)

All congregations want to thrive. A congregation (or any organization) is thriving when it achieves missional goals (vitality) and is likely to continue doing so into the future (sustainability). This checklist helps you quickly see how you rate your congregations’ vitality and sustainability.

****RESOURCES   
  
TO REVITALIZE, REDEVELOP OR RESEARCH YOUR COMMUNITY**

1. <https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/generations-age/generations/millennials/>

**Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins**

Michael Dimock president of Pew Research Center

For decades, Pew Research Center has been committed to measuring public attitudes on key issues and documenting differences in those attitudes across demographic groups. One lens often employed by researchers at the Center to understand these differences is that of generation.

Generations provide the opportunity to look at Americans both by their place in the life cycle – whether a young adult, a middle-aged parent or a retiree – and by their membership in a cohort of individuals who were born at a similar time.

As we’ve examined in [past work](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2015/09/03/the-whys-and-hows-of-generations-research/), generational cohorts give researchers a tool to analyze changes in views over time. They can provide a way to understand how different formative experiences (such as world events and technological, economic and social shifts) interact with the life-cycle and aging process to shape people’s views of the world. While younger and older adults may differ in their views at a given moment, generational cohorts allow researchers to examine how today’s older adults felt about a given issue when they themselves were young, as well as to describe how the trajectory of views might differ across generations.

Pew Research Center has been studying the [Millennial generation](https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/generations-age/generations/millennials/) for [more than a decade](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2007/01/09/a-portrait-of-generation-next/). But by 2018, it became clear to us that it was time to determine a cutoff point between Millennials and the next generation. Turning 38 in 2019, the oldest Millennials are [well into adulthood](https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/), and they first entered adulthood before today’s youngest adults

In order to keep the Millennial generation analytically meaningful, and to begin looking at what might be unique about the next cohort, Pew Research Center decided a year ago to use 1996 as the last birth year for Millennials for our future work. Anyone born between 1981 and 1996 (ages 23 to 38 in 2019) is considered a Millennial, and anyone born from 1997 onward is part of a new generation.

**RESOURCES (continued)**

1. + ELCA STUDY ON “Listening to GenZ Experience.”PDF. More than 50 percent of the US population is under the age of 40, and GenZ is leading the way (Brookings Institute, 2020). GenZ has great confidence in their ability to

create change and has great hope for the future. [www.ntnt.org](http://www.ntnt.org)

1. + online ELCA Congregational Vitality Trainings contact: [irma@ntnl.org](mailto:irma@ntnl.org)
2. + Faithful Innovation: Luther Seminary & NTNL Synod Welcome to talk to Pastor Kris Totzke about this resource; kris@ntnl.org

Quick snapshot: <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/sherman-tx>

Detailed, long, lots of information and lots of ads: city-data.com/city/Sherman-Texas.html

From the census bureau:

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/shermancitytexas/PST040219>

Chamber of Commerce website (not demographics per se, but lots of information about industry and city make up):

<https://sedco.org/>

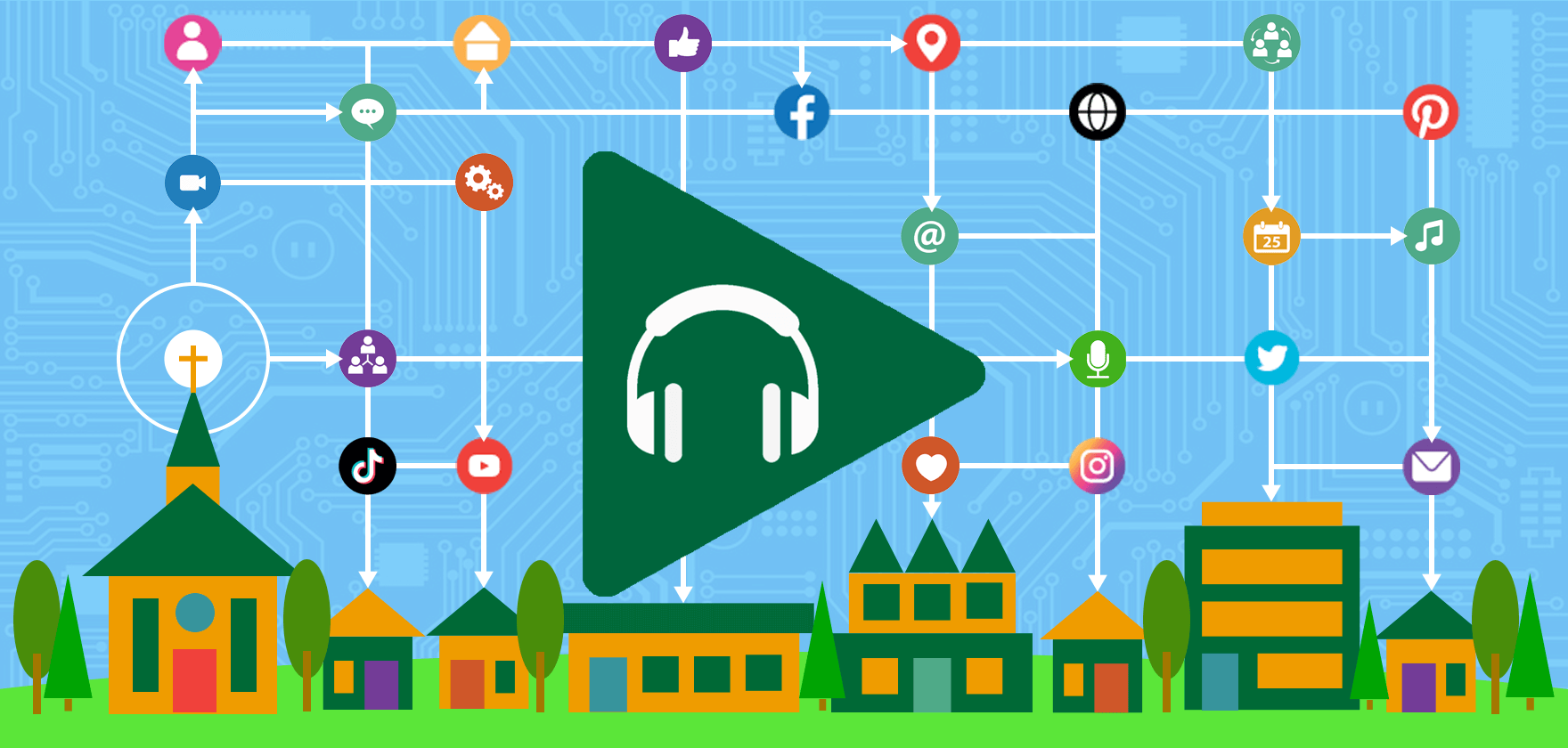
1. This is a free webpage that provides contextual demographics:  
    <http://www.city-data.com/>
2. elcaresources.org/register: this is an app with Holy Closure resources, Grief, and processes.

**Post-evaluation questions**

What groups or organizations are you excited to work with?

How will you get involved?

**TECHNOLOGY**



This section is to help to look beyond traditional church gathering and explore ways and means of reaching the entire congregation, community and potential members and support by bringing services and Bible studies and events to a broader audience. The ability to reach our shut-in, hospitalized or out of the area congregants can and will increase attendance and, probably participation in every area of worship, fellowship, and outreach. Using technology is a simple and easy way to so.

The year 2020 showed us how quickly we can change, adapt to, and learn new things. It also showed us how deep and strong are our faith, hope and resilience and, mainly, our belief in God and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Our creativity and innovation became priorities and mainstays in finding ways to worship and fellowship due to the pandemic. Use of home computers (desktops, laptops, tablets and smartphones) are ways to visually connect through Zoom, Skype, Facebook Live, YouTube and TikTok that many of our congregations use for worship and fellowship.

Holy Ground is the place set apart for divine worship, with reverence in our hearts. Solemn awe and deep seriousness are appropriate for coming into the place set apart for the worship of God, for wherever the Lord is, constitutes holy ground. This ground can be a physical space or digital space so long as we worship and fellowship – spreading the Good News and praising our Lord Jesus Christ and Creator God. Because in-person gatherings can be challenging for some because of distance, weather, illness, or age; digital gatherings are quite convenient and useful. This past year has shown an uptick in worship attendance using the social media (YouTube and Facebook Live) as well as video conferencing (Zoom and Skype). TikTok can post snippets of songs, sermons, or events that congregations perform.

As we move into new times, we can start in-person gatherings even though the parameters and restrictions still exist. With that, gatherings are limited, and some people just aren’t comfortable meeting in person or just immobile or have transportation issues. The challenge of maintaining and increasing attendance for worship and ministries become even more apparent. This brings about ‘hybrid’ worship, fellowship, meetings, and outreach. Because stasis and tradition are a big part of church life, doing things different can be trying. However, change is inevitable, and it is good.

**Pre-evaluation Questions**

Have you provided online worship options in your congregation? If so, what has been

learned from that?

What has online worship done for your congregation? What have you heard from others

about it?

How did you learn to access online services, were you given a learning opportunity to

access these things?

If you have not started this, why not?

**More houses of worship are returning to normal operations, but in-person attendance is unchanged since fall**

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/03/22/more-houses-of-worship-are-returning-to-normal-operations-but-in-person-attendance-is-unchanged-since-fall/>

**SUGGESTIONS:**

1. Get reliable and stable internet and wi-fi throughout your sanctuary

2. Do the same with audio, computer, and video equipment and systems

3. Have a couple of people who are tech savvy, who can teach how to use system and can troubleshoot via a phone call

4. Get a few people who enjoy social media and are willing to post, text and email

5. Invite 3 to 5 others to learn how to operate the system(s) and do postings

6. Establish weekly schedules to check, set up, and operate equipment for each service.

7. Establish schedules for operating and maintaining equipment and system

Volunteers are the greatest sources for everything. Old and young, people are always willing to share their talents and time. Cross-training and mentoring allows for more volunteers. These are opportunities to invite the congregation and community to be involved. Also, virtual services and advertising encourages new membership from broader geographical areas. Using

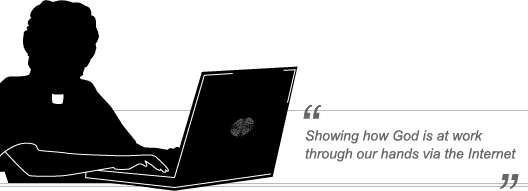
digital wallets as well as the traditional forms for collecting tithes and offering allows payment flexibility.

Diagram

Description automatically generated

# **Web Ministry (from ELCA Information Technology Page**)

## Resources for enhancing your congregation's Web site



Thank you for your commitment to show how God is at work through our hands via the Internet! We hope the ideas and resources on this page assist you in your efforts. If you don't find the help you need on this page, feel free to contact us. See separate resources on [guidelines for using](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Guidelines_for_Using_Photos_of_Congregation_Members.pdf) [photos of congregation members](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Guidelines_for_Using_Photos_of_Congregation_Members.pdf), [social media for congregations](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Social_Media_and_Congregations.pdf), and [online giving options](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Online_Giving_Options_for_Congregations_and_Synods.pdf).

# The Basics

## Step One: Planning

See the "Getting Started" section below for resources to help you describe your audience, define your purpose, prioritize your needs, inventory your assets, and garner organizational support.

Develop a set of web content guidelines that meet the needs of your members for privacy and confidentiality, and also adhere to copyright law.

## Step Two: Design Your Site

Define the content you'd like to start with, and design site navigation with growth in mind. Do an inventory of site features (e.g. congregation e-mail devotional, calendar with different views, private chat for youth, photo albums for congregation events, blogs for reports from congregational trips, private congregation directory, etc.). This will help when you approach the next step.

## Step Three: Select the Tools and a Host for Your Site

Most people use website management software or a "content management system" to develop and maintain their site. Depending on the software or system you select and the features you've described in step 2, there may be advantages of one web hosting plan over another.

## Step Four: Maintain Your Site

Here's the liability with developing a congregation website: If you develop a page and never update it, this can reflect poorly on your congregation. By analyzing how communication flows in your congregation you can develop procedures for getting the latest information and making sure outdated information is removed. Maintenance also means promoting your site by registering in search engines and publishing your web address everywhere. Don't forget to report your Web address to the ELCA churchwide office, so we can put it in the [congregation lookup](http://www.elca.org/ELCA/Search/Find-a-Congregation.aspx) [system](http://www.elca.org/ELCA/Search/Find-a-Congregation.aspx). Maintenance also means checking your site for broken links and missing images (most web software has reports for this). Return to step one, step back and review your site periodically.

# Getting Started

Congregations and other organizations across the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are discovering that the web can be used effectively to support their members, and to reach out to others in their communities and around the world. When people ask for help designing and maintaining their Web pages, we usually advise being specific about the goals they want to accomplish with their site and having someone with professional design skills assist. Here are some selected resources you may find helpful as you begin planning an effective web ministry:

## [Designing Congregational Web Sites](http://hirr.hartsem.edu/leadership/designing_church_sites.html)

A helpful guide by Scott Thumma of Hartford Seminary, covers most planning and organizational issues and includes a helpful section on criteria for evaluating congregation Web sites (with sample evaluations), and a survey of congregation webmasters.

## [Web Ministry](http://www.umcom.org/learn/what-is-web-ministry)

A comprehensive resource developed by United Methodist Communications based on web ministry workshops. Includes information on social media.

## [Pew Internet and American Life Project](http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/02/24/the-internet-and-religion-the-great-disruption/)

An ongoing program of research into how the Internet affects our lives.

# What to Include: Site Content and Features

Here are some ideas for what to include in your website design:

* The full name, location, mailing address and phone number for your congregation. Make this prominent on the home page and available on every page, and easily accessible through a "Contact Us" link.
* E-mail connection to the pastor or responsible congregation staff member/leader.
* The [ELCA brandmark](http://www.elca.org/brandmark) with a link to the ELCA home page: [www.elca.org.](http://www.elca.org/)
* [ELCA Web feeds](http://www.elca.org/feeds) provide dynamic content — regularly changing news headlines, prayers, and Bible verses — on your site. This is fresh content you don't have to maintain!
* An e-mail link to your website editor so visitors can report errors or make suggestions.
* Display your congregation's service times prominently.
* A congregation calendar or weekly event listing is a helpful reference for members and a window into congregational life for visitors.
* Features that welcome visitors to the congregation (area map, driving directions, photo of the church, building map, frequently asked questions, nursery information, links to information about the community).
* Links to or content from ELCA.org that is **evangelistic** (devotional materials, prayer request section, messages connecting faith to daily life).
* Descriptions of the ministry areas of your congregation, with contact information for group leaders.
* Staff and volunteer leader profiles and a description of who to go to for what.
* Congregational directory in a password protected area.
* Forms to collect data to support the congregational program and member needs: time and talent survey, professional services directory, Sunday school and vacation Bible school registrations forms.
* Audio or video clips of sermons. Sermon transcripts. Previews of upcoming sermon topics.
* A good way to get additional ideas for content for your site is to browse the sites of other congregations.

# Where to Put It: Web Hosting Services

Whether you are using software like [Expression Web,](http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/download/details.aspx?id=36179) [PageBreeze,](http://www.pagebreeze.com/) etc., or want to develop and maintain your site using a content management system (where you edit and update Web pages through your browser), you'll need to find a site hosting service. It is possible to set up your own Web server, but that requires a high level of technical expertise, especially regarding Web security. Indexes such as [Webhosting Search](http://www.webhostingsearch.com/) and [Tophosts](http://www.tophosts.com/) provide ways for you to shop for a Web hosting service. Take your list of features and compare that to the specifications of hosting services in your price range.

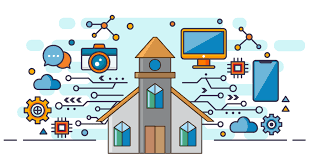
Most hosting services will assist with registering your domain (e.g., www.mychurch.org), or you can go to separate domain registrars like [Network Solutions](http://www.networksolutions.com/) or [Google Domains](https://domains.google/%23/). Here are a few hosting services to start with:

* [Leiturgia Communications Inc.](http://leiturgia.us/) - uses an open source program that allows you to manage the content and leverage the latest technological advances by using the Web browser for editing of your site. Hosting plans begin at $15 a month. Leiturgia Communications also offers affordable and streamlined web site development, maintenance, and marketing services that are exclusively tailored to fit the needs and resources of Lutheran churches.
* [Church 360: Unite](http://www.360unite.com/) - a congregation "Intranet" product of particular interest to users of [Church 360: Members](http://www.360members.com/) church management software. Also supports the display of "public" pages, so it could serve as your primary site host. Marketed and supported by Concordia Publishing House.
* There are a number of companies that offer free hosting for non-profits (e.g. [Dreamhost](https://help.dreamhost.com/hc/en-us/articles/236316908-DreamPress-non-profit-discount) or [Google Sites](https://gsuite.google.com/products/sites/)). Be sure to examine the hosting agreement. Some may require a site- wide footer advertising the company.
* WordPress is a popular blogging platform and content management system. You can build a site on [www.wordpress.com,](http://www.wordpress.com/) or install the WordPress open source software ([www.wordpress.org](http://www.wordpress.org/)) on servers offered by many hosting companies.

**Post-evaluation Questions**

What needs to be incorporated to make this a possibility?

What joys/disagreements do you have about utilizing technology?



**Preparing for Hybrid Worship Services**

<https://www.cascadespresbytery.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Hybrid-worship-streaming-system-1.pdf>

As congregations consider what their worship will look like after COVID, there are some

things to keep in mind. Not every one will feel comfortable returning to worship right away. Some in person worship may take place, but how will you reach those who remain home?

Broadcasting from the church office or from home may no longer work for you. If you have been using a smart phone, you may need to make some changes. The camera may have to be located in the back of the sanctuary and connected to the sanctuary sound system.

Some musicians may still feel more comfortable recording their music from home or in the sanctuary when congregants are not present. Will you want to allow worship participants who are watching remotely to be able to interact live? What software will you use to accomplish this if you decide personal interaction is important to you? Do you have the right equipment? Is your internet connection powerful enough for you to accomplish your goals?

Congregations can do live worship and live stream at the same time, incorporate pre-

recorded videos and allow for people to participate (in a limited manner, there are some technical challenges when you incorporate this) but it all takes careful advanced planning.

There are recording/streaming systems that will allow congregations to incorporate the church sound system, multiple views of the worship leaders, presentation software and pre- recorded videos. Here are some ideas that may help in your planning. These systems assume you may be applying for a Tech Grant are kept at the range of $1000 and slightly over.

**The First Step is make sure you are connected reliably to the internet.** We highly recommend that you find a way to connect directly from your router by Ethernet cable to your sanctuary. Once you have an Ethernet cable to your sanctuary you can add an Ethernet switch from which you can connect your streaming device and any Wi-Fi solution you may want to utilize. If you simply cannot find a way to do this, this article shows ways to get your most reliable Wi-Fi connection into the sanctuary. Connecting to the internet in your sanc[tuary](https://www.cascadespresbytery.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Connecting-to-the-Internet.pdf)

A close up of a calculator

Description automatically generated with medium confidence**Note: Why we recommend the ATEM Mini Pro in these systems.** The ATEM Mini Pro allows you to stream to YouTube or Facebook with the push of a button. The basic operation of this mixer allows people with limited technical knowledge to Live Stream worship.

**Flexible Cost Saving Live Streaming Systems**

**Option 1** *(a two-camera system is best for live streaming) Note: the mixer allows you to add at least two cameras and incorporate your presentation software. Several congregations in the presbytery have used a system like this with success.*

**Blackmagic Design ATEM Mini** HDMI Live Stream Switcher

**Canon VIXIA HF R800 Camcorder (2)**

**Cmple - High-Speed Mini HDMI to HDMI Cable** (HDMI to Mini HDMI) 4K Ready - 10 Feet, Black **(2)** These cables are appropriate if the cameras are side by side close to your mixer. If you decide to have your second camera farther away, you will need to adapt to the length of cable you will need. If your camera is farther than 30 ft. away, see option at the end of equipment list.

**HDMI cable (2)**

**Cat6 cable** to connect unit to internet 10’

**TV for Monitor** (any TV with an HDMI input will work)

**Ethernet switch** (needed only if you have only one ethernet port in your sanctuary. It is recommended to use a direct feed to your internet provider but in some cases wireless connection will also work if the speed is adequate)

**Audio Cable** You may have to study the output of your sanctuary sound mixer to see what cables or adapters you need in order to connect to the Blackmagic Design Mini Pro sound input.

**USB Male to Male CABLE**

**Optional**

If your 2nd camera is farther away than 30 ft. you will need these adapters

**J-Tech Digital HDMI Extender**

**Cat6 Ethernet Cable** (50 ft White) This length for the cable is only a sugges tion. You will need to measure what length you need depending on the location of the second camera.

The mixer in this system does not have built in live streaming and recording, so you would need to use streaming software similar to OBS, Open Broadcasting Software. <https://obsproject.com/>

**Option 2**

**Better system with a PTZ camera**

*This system incorporates a PTZ camera that can be controlled remotely. A PTZ camera allows for multiple views and presets. Note: the second camera allows you to switch to it while making adjustments on the PTZ camera.*

**Canon VIXIA HF R800 Camcorder**

**AViPAS AV-1081 HDMI PTZ**

**Blackmagic Design ATEM Mini Pro HDMI Live Stream Switcher**

**Cmple - High-Speed Mini HDMI to HDMI Cable (HDMI to Mini HDMI) 4K Ready -**

**10 Feet, Black** [**9**](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B003V08WY2/?coliid=I2DQ7AFDB4TEBR&colid=11WT5K2EBPUIT&psc=1&ref_=lv_ov_lig_dp_it)

**J-Tech Digital HDMI Extender**

**Cat 6 Ethernet Cable 50 ft White**

**WD USB Hard Drive** [**Click for Link**](https://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/1322074-REG/wd_wdbu6y0020bbk_wesn_2tb_elements_portable_hard.html)

**USB type-c adapter** Needed to set up the Blackmagic mini-Pro with an available computer or allows for a USB thumb drive or Hard Drive to enable recording.

*These items may or may not be needed to connect from the presentation computer*

*to the mixer*

**StarTech DVI Splitter Cable – DVI** [**Click for Link**](https://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/1074538-REG/startech_dvispl1dd_1_dvi_d_digital_video_splitter.html)

**Pearstone DVI to HDMI Adapter,** 2-Pack Gold-Plated 1080P Male to Female Converter (Black) [**Click for link**](https://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/902476-REG/pearstone_advh_c3_hdmi_female_to_dvi_d_male.html)

**Option 3**

**Same system as above except for the replacing of the ATEM mini-Pro mixer with the ATEM Mini mixer**

**Blackmagic Design ATEM Mini** HDMI Live Stream Switcher

This mixer does not have built in live streaming and recording, so you would need to use streaming software similar to OBS, Open Broadcasting Software. **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**[obsproject.com/](https://obsproject.com/)

**Option 4**

**Simple system with a PTZ camera**

**AViPAS AV**-1082W Full HD USB 3.0 PTZ Camera (White)

This is a USB camera and does not require a mixer. However, you will need a computer or laptop and software like OBS to live stream and record. <https://obsproject.com/>

**These items may be needed.**

This adapter will let you capture audio directly from your sound mixer in the sanctuary. (note: adjust input volume for organ music)

You will also need a cable and probably an adapter so you can connect to your sound mixer. It depends on what kind of audio out jacks you have on your sound mixer when considering what cable or adapter you will need. Many sound mixers have RCA tape record out jacks. Since the sound capture device above has RCA inputs, this cable would work. More lengths available.

If you have only quarter inch outputs on you sound mixer you will need adapters. If you have female XLR out jacks only you will need an adapter

If you have male XLR outputs only you will need 2 adapters The PTZ camera can be mounted on a wall, a shelf or on a tripod.

This system gives you multiple views with the camera with multiple presets and can be controlled remotely. However, keep in mind that since you would only have one camera people will see the movement of the camera as you switch scenes.

*A way around this would be to add a second USB webcam. That way you can switch to the second camera while you are making adjustments to your PTZ camera. After adjustments, you can then switch back to the PTZ camera. Switching cameras views is done in the OBS software.*

**Software considerations for live streaming**

**OBS software** - With this software, you can record your videos or live steam to YouTube or Facebook. OBS is a very flexible system allowing you to incorporate multiple cameras,

graphics, sound sources and presentation software. It can be used with any of the hard- ware options above. <https://obsproject.com/>

**YouTube and Facebook** - These platforms give you a high quality live stream. However, interaction with the congregation is limited. To interact you are limited to live chat during the stream or Zoom meeting (or similar platforms) for live discussion and prayer before or after the live stream.

**Zoom Meetings** -The advantage of this platform is that you can live stream your worship, muting participant mics until you want to allow interaction. (note: if you don’t mute the mics your live stream audio can suffer greatly) When you are ready for comments, prayer concerns or minute for missions from people watching remotely, you can unmute mics individually. (Note: this could cause some confusion for users and worship leaders but it could yield a much more interactive experience.)

Also, you can live stream to YouTube or Facebook at the same time you are using Zoom.

**Important note on the quality of the live stream.** Zoom default settings don’t necessarily allow for high quality audio when you are live streaming music. See this article that gives ideas on adjusting settings so that music will sound much better on your live stream. [Better Music in Zoom](https://www.cascadespresbytery.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/better-music-sound-in-zoom-tutorial.pdf)

**RESOURCES**

**Software Resources**

* [Web Style Guide,](http://www.webstyleguide.com/wsg3/index.html) 3rd Ed. Online guide to all aspects of Web site design, usability, style and editorial guidelines. Great place to start.
* [MyChurchEvents.com](http://www.mychurchevents.com/) offers many calendar features for an annual fee.
* Hardware and software [discounts](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Technology_Purchasing.pdf) are available for ELCA ministries through CDW, Dell and other computer.
* [TechSoup.org](http://www.techsoup.org/religious-organizations) also offers software and hardware discounts and great technology tutorials and a weekly e-letter geared to non-profits.
* [HTML Goodies.](http://www.htmlgoodies.com/) Sections for software reviews, tutorials, authoring, design and graphics.
* [Audio editing tutorial](http://www.umcom.org/learn/easily-edit-sermon-or-podcast-audio-with-audacity). 9-minute video tutorial on how to use the free Audacity software to edit sermon/podcast audio files.

## **Blogs**

* [Church Marketing Sucks](http://churchmarketingsucks.com/)

Launched by Center for Church Communication in 2004, the blog features news and updates on church marketing, ideas and resources, and a community of church communicators.

* [Writing for the Web](http://crofsblogs.typepad.com/ckbetas)

Comments and links about the fast-changing genres of Webwriting by Crawford Kilian

* [Current Issues in Web Usability](http://www.useit.com/alertbox/)

Web compilation of Dr. Jakob Nielsen's bi-weekly e-mail columns on Web usability.

* [Church Mag](http://churchm.ag/)

Exploring the intersection of church and technology.

* [MinistryTech Magazine](http://ministrytech.com/)

Collection of blogs and an online community for people interested in church computing and video.

* [Church Tech Today](http://churchtechtoday.com/)

Has sections on Church Social Media, Software, Websites, Mobile, A/V, Communication, etc.

* Vanco Online: Live streaming worship, e-Giving, outreach & communication. We have a PP presentation and they offer a great platform for outreach, data, and new technology. [The Gift of Online Giving (Free eBook Included) (vancopayments.com)](https://www.vancopayments.com/the-gift-of-online-giving-free-ebook-included?ecid=ACsprvukuAofqELiR0sqVHFp5SumFz8TN66RuVVSMCTnvXUNL4Sx2sLkEKfNeU2cuwQ41bO_90Jj&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=212138736&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8nA0CB-VLrR5CbgQKu894ziDabpeBO0ujr1QgonPqkXX9VpTskIUviUYdfc7rFPjrq6yK3u0gPxD3GLjAgQfQLnBEFog&utm_content=212138736&utm_source=hs_email)

Technology tools for a Hybrid church you could find the resource on specific link on NTNL website*:* https://www.ntnl.org/event/digital-church-tools-for-2020-and-beyond/

**RESOURCES**

**(Continued)**

**ARTICLES**

[Hybrid church - Living Lutheran](https://www.livinglutheran.org/2021/12/hybrid-church/)

<https://www.livinglutheran.org/2021/12/hybrid-church/>

[Essential Tools for Hybrid Church Ministry](https://www.thefoundrycommunity.com/essential-tools-for-hybrid-church-ministry/)

<https://www.thefoundrycommunity.com/essential-tools-for-hybrid-church-ministry/>

The Hybrid Future of the Church <https://outreachmagazine.com/features/leadership/64796-the-hybrid-future-of-the-church.html>

Jason Moore: 3 strategies to hybrid worship <https://www.minnesotaumc.org/newsdetail/jason-moore-3-strategies-to-hybrid-worship-14963028>

Moving Forward With Hybrid Worship

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/moving-forward-with-hybrid-worship/>

Presenting Hybrid Church Effectively (Part 2)

<https://livingchurch.org/2021/07/07/presenting-hybrid-church-effectively-part-2/>

Is There a Place for Post-Pandemic Hybrid Worship?

<https://livingchurch.org/2021/10/12/is-there-a-place-for-post-pandemic-hybrid-worship/>

**BOOKS**

“Becoming a Hybrid Church” by Dave Daubert and Richard E. T. Jorgensen Jr.

“Hybrid Church” by [Dave Browning](https://www.thriftbooks.com/a/dave-browning/268014/)

1. Unless otherwise noted, the activities are taken from our seminar, *Discovering Hope*, as presented by *Pastor Nancy Nyland, Director for Evangelical Mission, Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA.* [*nnyland@iksynod.org*](mailto:nnyland@iksynod.org) *317-625-4057* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)