



*Joining God in Shaping Our Future*

GOING LOCAL:  
JOINING GOD  
IN THE  
NEIGHBORHOOD

INTRODUCTION  
TO THE JOURNEY

# Going Local: Joining God in the Neighborhood

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## Introduction to the Journey

Welcome! You are embarking on an exciting journey, and we are honored to be sharing the journey with you. We believe that it is conceivable for this journey to take us into unexpected places none of us can see or imagine from here. You will be in good company, as you join with teams from other congregations and those who have gone before.

Make no mistake about it. This has the makings of a real adventure. There is the potential for profound change, reweaving the very fabric of who we are, rather than just patching up or adjusting or even fixing selected parts. Over time, congregations can easily become closed circles that have lost the capacity to connect with and listen to the people in our neighborhoods. This journey is about learning how to follow and join with what God is doing in our daily lives – in the places where we work, live, play and worship.

The reweaving of our life must be the work of the people not the plans, visions and strategies of leaders. Most change processes are designed from the top down, and this kind of change works for a while (if a key leader is involved) but doesn't become part of a congregation's way of life. We are inviting you into a new space; a space of transformation as God's people move forward listening to one another, to God and to your neighbors.

This journey is about learning how to follow and join with what God is doing in our daily lives – in the places where we work, live, play and worship. We are inviting you into a new space: a space of transformation as God's people move forward listening to one another, to God, and to your neighbors.

## Navigating the Journey

Navigating this journey, in this new world, takes a different approach. Reweaving congregational life so that it becomes a place where God's transforming work in the world is lived out requires the people of a congregation to develop some new habits, practices, attitudes and values. This is not an easy task. It takes work and persistence and an understanding of the rules of the road.



What will we be doing, and how do we go about cultivating new habits and practices to enter and engage our neighborhoods and communities in a new and different way?

We learn by doing and experimenting.

Not just by reading books, seeing sermons or videos, or being given some big vision. We act our way into new ways of thinking and seeing the world. We reflect on what we've done, adjust and try new experiments. Too often we get caught in the notion that we have to change the internal life and structures of our church. We may, eventually need to do that but it's not where we begin. In fact, we suggest that you don't start changing lots of things inside the church.

## What to Expect

This journey involves practice and persistence and will occur over a period of time. This journey is about transformation, and it starts with a small group and expands to include more and more people. As new practices and habits take hold, you will notice that people are asking different questions, and having new ideas about what it means to be engaged in your neighborhoods and communities. You will know that you are well on your way when you are beginning to:

- Have ideas, shaped by who you are as a people, about how to reweave the life of your congregation for mission in your communities.
- Internalize the skills for continually leading the reweaving of your congregation's life.
- See that the congregation is discovering ways of putting into practice the mission of God in your neighborhoods.
- Find fresh energy as all kinds of unexpected people get involved in experiments in their neighborhoods.
- Come alive to listening to Scripture as Dwelling in the Word moves you to actions in your communities.
- Know how to do a kind of outreach and evangelism that connects with people joining with them where they are.
- Set the stage for becoming a church that is also being changed from the inside out – you won't stay the same and it won't be "business as usual".



## FRAMING THE JOURNEY

The journey to join God in shaping our future points towards a core question:

*How do we go on a journey together to discern what God is up to in our neighborhoods, and join God there?*



### OUR FIVE PRACTICES ON THE JOURNEY

At the heart of our journey together are five core practices or steps. Through engaging in these practices, we create space and time for listening, discerning, and testing out what we believe God is up to. As we move through and repeat these practices we develop new habits, attitudes and values. These practices point us back to God and the core question.

#### LISTENING

- Listen to God and one another through *Dwelling in the Word*.
- Listen & share one another's stories of God's life in the congregation.
- Listen to the neighborhood through simple exercises in "walking about."

#### DISCERNING

- Continue listening to God and one another through *Dwelling in the Word*.
- Bring the listening together to ask the question: "What experiments might the Spirit be inviting us to engage with in our neighborhoods?"

#### EXPERIMENTING

- Continue listening to God and one another through *Dwelling in the Word*.
- Carry out the experiments, reflect on process, adjust, and repeat. Teams reflect with a coach on what they are doing.
- Teams prepare a report on their experiments, what they have learned, what they have sensed God doing, etc.

#### EVALUATING

- Continue listening to God and one another through *Dwelling in the Word*.
- Experiment teams report into their congregations telling the stories of what they have experienced.

#### DECIDING: LIVING INTO A NEW FUTURE

- Continue listening to God and one another through *Dwelling in the Word*.
- Plan next round of experiments.
- Participate in gathering with clergy and Diocesan Leadership Team to explore living into a new future.

# Introduction to Listening

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## Why Listen?

Listening is a critical stage on the journey, and it is the first step toward establishing new practices for listening to one another in your congregations and in your neighborhoods. This first practice forms the foundation for the entire journey, although listening will be fundamental to success throughout the entire journey.



## Why is the listening process so important?

- ❖ Listening to one another deepens understanding and trust.
- ❖ Listening helps us learn how to discern.
- ❖ Listening invites us to step back from solutions and fixes and take the time to talk with one another about how they are hearing the Spirit.
- ❖ Listening helps us get beneath the surface to hear the Spirit in new ways.

Consider the image of an iceberg. This illustrates a key principal of listening and discernment. We are used to seeing an iceberg in terms of what is above the surface of the water. We know that under the surface there is the possibility for a massive amount of ice but we tend to give attention to what is floating in front of us. When we see things at the surface we miss 90% of what is happening.

It's kind of like coffee hour. We often move through the room asking surface questions and rarely expect anything deep. "How are you? I'm fine. How are you?" Listening deeply to one another helps us get beneath the surface to discern what God might be saying to us.

## God's future is among God's people.

- ❖ Congregations have come to believe that the source of answers and help lies outside themselves. They default to those deemed experts. Discernment is shaped around assumptions rooted in Scripture: The Spirit of God is among the people of God, among the ordinary men, women and children who comprise the congregation, not only the Clergy or Vestry.
- ❖ The answer to the question: "What is God calling us to do in this community?" is among the people. The work of leadership is not to come up with plans but to cultivate an environment in which the missional imagination of the people of God is called forth, in lived action and lives.

In this first practice, our work will be to:

**Listen to the God in Scripture**  
**Listen to One Another**  
**Listen to Our Neighbors**

## Why Listen to God in Scripture by Dwelling in the Word?

Dwelling in scripture is an ancient Christian practice, but for many of us it is a new spiritual practice. Dwelling creates space for the Spirit to open up our imagination and helps us to form community based in scripture. All that's required is the scripture, questions for reflection and a willingness to share your experience with others. As we practice dwelling, we listen deeply to each other – listening one another into free speech. Listening and attending is the first step in our journey of joining God in our neighborhoods.

Dwelling helps us re-enter the biblical narrative. When we dwell in the same scripture repeatedly over a significant period of time, the text begins to live in us as we live in the text. As a group engages the practice together, it can form a shared sense of the challenges facing us and shape our imagination.

## Why Luke 10:1-12?

Luke 10: 1-12 is a text about mission. It describes the sending of 70 ordinary people to all the towns and villages where Jesus, himself, intended to go. It expresses our mission as God's people in our local church – to empower a movement of women and men who see their neighborhoods and communities as places of God's life.

Luke 10: 1-12 is a text about mission, but more importantly about the manner of mission. Jesus challenges the expectations and roles of the group that he sends out. People are being pushed out beyond the categories they had established and invited to enter spaces they had not imagined nor could manage out of their sets of roles and identities. The story is a guide for us as we remember to trust the actions of God – that God IS alive and active through the Spirit in our lives, in the stories of our faith communities, and the stories of our neighbors and wider community.

## Why listen to one another through Listening Interviews?

A core conviction of the listening process is that God's Spirit is among the people of God and, if the Spirit of God is among the people, then God's future is also among the people. By deeply listening to one another, congregations begin to see that it is in our ordinary stories that God has been and continues to work. We learn to listen for God's presence amongst ourselves as congregations and discover how to listen to where God is at work in the stories of our people. We begin to feel confident that God speaks through the people of our congregations in many ways.

The following set of simple questions is designed to help listen appreciatively to God's work among us:

- Reflecting back on your experience at our church: When did you feel most engaged, alive and motivated? What was happening that contributed to this experience? What did you do? How did it feel?
- What do you think are the most important, life-giving characteristics of our church?
- When are we at our best?
- Describe a time in our church when God was most real and alive for you. What was it about this experience that was so important to you? What did it say about God's activities in our church?
- What have been the most significant worship experiences of our church for you?
- If you could make three wishes for the future of our church, what would they be?

## Why Listen to God in our Neighborhoods?



The clues to what God is up to are among the stories of ordinary people in our congregations and in our neighborhoods. On this journey we invite you to participate in some simple ways of “discovering” and listening to your local neighborhoods in some fresh ways.

*One way to define neighborhood is the places where we spend most of our daily lives, in other words, the places where we work, live, play, and worship.*

Many of us commute by car or train or bus.

What do you notice as you travel to/from work or school? Many of us work out in a gym on a regular basis. What do you notice? Who do you notice at different times of the day? Where else do people gather as you go about your daily lives? What might God be up to in bringing people together in these ways?

## Why this Journey?

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### Why Join God in the Neighborhood?

For far too long we have been focused on fixing the church. “How do we fix the church? The diocese? The clergy? Our parishioners? How can we fix things, so people will come?” Joining God in the neighborhood is about asking different questions.

We most often ask “church questions”- How do we meet people’s needs? Where can we “help” in the community? How do we get people to come to our church? How do we get people to see that we are a warm, friendly, caring group? By joining God in the places we live, work, play, and worship, we begin to ask “Luke 10” questions - What might God be up to ahead of us in the neighborhoods where we live? How do we discover where God is already at work? What will it be like to join in with what God is doing?

In this video Alan Roxburgh invites us into the why of joining God in our neighborhood, <http://dioceseofnewark.org/content/video-why-join-god-neighborhood-alan-roxburgh>. Alan is a pastor, teacher, writer and consultant with more than 30 years’ experience in church leadership, consulting and seminary education, and has been working our diocese for the past three years. Here are the video’s main points:

1. What our congregations were. . .
  - Our congregations were part of the neighborhood.
  - That has changed -- people drive in and then disperse.

- Congregations are declining.
  - We need a different way of thinking about Church.
  - Churches were designed to be places in the neighborhood.
2. Societies have changed dramatically.
- It was natural/normal to be a part of church – the rhythms of the church.
  - No longer normal.
  - We are working hard to improve – to make church more attractive.
  - No longer speaks to many out in our communities/societies.
  - We need to *ask different questions*.
  - How do we listen to hear what's happening to people?
  - How do we join with them?
3. We need to go where people are.
- We acknowledge this is HARD WORK.
  - It involves risk.
  - We are being asked to join with what God is up to in the neighborhoods and communities in which we live.
4. This is who God is.
- God comes to us.
  - “The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.” (The Message)
  - “The Word became flesh and made his home among us.” (CEV)
  - God pitches a tent beside us.
  - As God’s people, God is inviting us to where God is.



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