FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ROCKAWAY

GROWING IN FAITH TOGETHER
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

2015/2016 CURRICULUM

ENGAGE: MISSION
A WORD TO THE SHEPHERDS

Welcome to part three of the Engage curriculum! We’ve all come a long way in the past two years as we completed Engage: Gospel and Discipleship together. How exciting it’s been to witness the spiritual growth of our group members as they let the Holy Spirit work in their lives.

We know it hasn’t been easy for you as Shepherds to convince your group members to move outside their comfort zones but they never would have been able to do it without your patience, love and support. We thank you for your continued commitment to this ministry. It is truly transforming our congregation!

At the end of Engage: Gospel we wrote our faith stories of God’s influence in our lives. At the end of Engage: Discipleship we wrote our Discipleship Plan to live a more Christ-centered life to prepare us to go out into our community with the Good News.

Part three of this curriculum is entitled Engage: Mission. Now that we know what we believe and how to live and work as Christ’s disciples, how do we go about connecting with the work that God is already doing in our community? How do we discern what the needs are in our community? How do we best serve God’s people outside of our church doors? These questions and more will be answered in the next year.

We would like the groups to continue praying in whatever format was comfortable for your members. While there will be no formal “Prayer Request” like last year, encourage your group members to pray for whatever is on their heart. There will be a “Prayer Reminder” scripture at the end of each lesson. This year we will have a “Practice” at the end of each lesson which will encourage group members to start looking at the community in which they live and slowly start to use the tools of discipleship they are learning about.

Our hope is that the continuation of the Engage series will build on the excitement and momentum of the past two years as we explore together what it truly means to be one of Christ’s disciples and “Go and tell!”

In faith and love,

Sue
Diane
FELLOWSHIP TIME

Fellowship Time before you start your lessons is an integral part of your small group. The relationships built in these groups strengthen our congregation and help us all to grow together in God’s love.

Here are a few gentle reminders about this important time during your group’s meetings:

--Have group members sit together during this sharing time. (There may be some individual conversation time before your gathering begins, this is fine, just make sure that you allow time to gather the group for sharing time together as well.

--Make sure that everyone in your group participates. As facilitator, it is your job to include everyone, even if they are hesitant to do so.

--Try to ask open-ended and follow-up questions when someone is sharing with the group.

--Use some of the conversation starters on the next page to get the party started!

If you have any questions about Fellowship Time, please feel free to contact Sue or Diane.
FELLOWSHIP TIME
CONVERSATION STARTERS

Where have you seen God’s presence in your life?

What is your favorite place to go on vacation? Why?

How have you served God this week?

Share some news about your family

Where do you need God’s presence in your life?

What do you like most about your job/retirement?

Name your favorite activity at church and why

Talk about a time when you relied on God

What are the different places you have lived?

When have you struggled with your faith?
SESSION 1 – Part 1
ALIGNING OUR LIVES WITH GOD’S MISSION

Supplies:

Bibles
Crosses

Check In: What was the most important thing you learned from last year’s study? How did you use it in your daily life? (Note to Shepherds: Please make a note of these comments).

Read Aloud: 2 Corinthians 5:17-20 We Are Ambassadors for Christ

In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

What does it mean to be a “new person” (new creation) in Christ? What changes?

What does it mean to be an “ambassador of Christ”?

What gifts are needed to be Christ’s ambassadors?

What gifts does God provide?
In Engage: Gospel we explored how our own stories of faith and the larger witness of Scripture are essential avenues for connecting with people beyond the church walls. In Engage: Discipleship we examined the discipleship directions that allow us to go deeper in our relationships and follow Jesus into the fullest life possible.

Have you shared your faith story with anyone since you wrote it?

Is there someone you are thinking about sharing it with but are hesitating? Why?

In Engage: Mission we begin the process of discerning how we can join God in what God is already up to in our communities. We will affirm once again that our mission is to join God in healing the brokenness that is not only inside us but also around us. A major question addressed in this resource is “How will the church help us align our lives with God’s mission?”

Engage: Mission is intended to challenge, inspire and support Christ’s disciples sent to respond to a world in need. This study is intended to challenge congregations to reach out with Christ’s care to the greater community; to take a good look at current ministries in order to strengthen those that are most effective; to determine new mission initiatives in response to Christ’s call to service and to respond with thanks to those currently serving as a part of God’s mission.

As you hear what we will be studying for the next year, are you excited or apprehensive? Why?

Note to Shepherds: Please explain to the group that we would like to continue praying together in whatever format you have been using. Explain that this year there will not be a formal Prayer Request but just encourage group members to pray for what is on their heart. At every meeting have the leader of the lesson read the Prayer Reminder.
**Prayer Reminder:** *Psalm 4:1*  “Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer.”

**Note to Shepherds:** After every lesson we will have a practice which we would like members to incorporate into their daily lives. While these may be a challenge for some, encourage members to give it a try and to also explore why they may be hesitating.

**Give each member of your group one of the crosses provided.**

**Practice:** We will be practicing ways to bring our faith with us when we go out into our community. Wear your cross every day during the next two weeks (*not just to church!*) as a tangible sign of your call to be an ambassador of Christ.
SESSION 1 – Part 2
ALIGNING OUR LIVES WITH GOD’S MISSION

Supplies:
Bibles

Check In: Did you wear your cross? What was it like to wear it and did anyone comment on it? Will you continue to wear it?

Read Aloud: Ephesians 4:1-16 Each Is Given Grace and Gifts By God

First, this is clearly a community centered in Christ. As different as individuals are from one another, all are made one by the peace of Christ. Second, Christ gives gifts to the church to equip the saints to accomplish God’s mission: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Through these gifts, each disciple is built up and equipped so that all can cooperate in God’s mission and not be distracted.

Some in the community of faith have a gift of apostleship, they have a heart for people beyond the church. Some have a prophetic gift; they help focus and align the gospel to our particular context. Some have a gift of evangelism; they freely share the good news of Christ with others. Some have a gift of service as pastor; they nurture people along the faith journey. Some have a gift of serving as teacher; they instruct and challenge people in living as disciples. Paul is clear that each one of these gifts is a crucial aspect of the expansive nature of God’s mission. Through the church, a community of gifted apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, people are equipped and nurtured to carry out God’s mission in homes, workplaces, schools and neighborhoods.

Do you see yourself as an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher?

If you don’t see yourself in any category, which one would you choose?
What would you need to do to fulfill that choice?

In Engage: Discipleship, we defined discipleship as the ministry of equipping and nurturing the followers of Christ for mission. Therefore, we continue to provide missional practices that are necessary for sending disciples into our surroundings as people of love, peace and justice. The church can no longer solely feed the spiritual needs of its members. Our call is to train people to engage in God’s mission in our neighborhoods and communities.

How has your Discipleship Plan affected your life?

Have you implemented any practices into your day?

Reflect on the apostle Paul’s image of a community overflowing with gifts. He writes, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” (Ephesians 4:4-7)

What have you discerned to be your gift? In what ways is your gift being used in God’s mission?

Our purpose in Engage: Mission is to explore what it means to be the church within our communities. If people are not showing up in our buildings, what does it mean for us to be the church where they live? We will explore what it means to be a sent people. We will address the sending capacity of our churches. In other words, what does it look like to be missionaries to our own neighborhoods? The latest statistics describe America as the fourth largest mission field in the world.

What does that mean for us as Christians living in America?

Our foundational belief is that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God’s purpose for the world is realized. We must then pursue those practices that will lead us into living the life of Christ.
**Prayer Reminder:** 1 Corinthians 14:15 “So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit but will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit but I will also sing with my mind.”

**Practice:** The next time you go out to eat, say grace before your meal. While some may think this is a showy way to express our faith, it is not. We thank God before our meals at home, why do we hesitate in public? Mainly because of our fear of being judged as we practice our Christian faith. If you are alone, bow your head and say a silent prayer. If you are with family or friends, say a quiet prayer aloud.
SESSION 1 – Part 3
ALIGNING OUR LIVES WITH GOD’S MISSION

Supplies:

Bibles
Copies of *Five Practices of Christ’s Disciples Inventory*

Check In: Did you say grace in a restaurant? If so, what was that experience like? If not, why did you hesitate?


Led by the Holy Spirit, the disciples of Christ exhibit the new life through five practices:

**Joining in Worship:** It is essential that we give our praises to God on a regular basis. The gods of culture are seductive and are always demanding our worship. Regular corporate praise and thanks focused on God keeps us engaged in God’s mission.

**Involvement with Scripture:** In both our personal and corporate encounters with Scripture, we engage the purposes and character of God. As we immerse ourselves in God’s story we are inspired to go deeper into our own stories. Also, ways to focus not only on the spiritual needs of our members but also on the needs of those beyond the church are revealed.
**Practice of Prayer:** Prayer undergirds everything. Our words and deeds come from our time in prayer.

**Sharing in Fellowship:** Fellowship is essential to the formation of a sending community. In this fellowship, we are nurtured and held accountable in the life of Christ through the Word, Sacraments and prayer. It is not possible to be on this mission alone!

**Breaking Bread:** There is nothing like sharing meals together to make us aware of our need for one another and the gifts of God. Often it is around meals that the differences we bring to the community find their unity in the saving love of God in Jesus.

Which one of these five practices comes easiest to our congregation? What practice is more of a challenge for us?

Part of our experience in Engage: Gospel was to encounter the witness of Scripture as God’s loving, redemptive mission to rescue a broken world. We examined how our stories of transformation are part of God’s mission to transform a world.

In Engage: Discipleship we examined various spiritual practices that enable us to connect more deeply with people inside the body of Christ so that we can be equipped as people of God and then sent out into the neighborhood.

Mission is all about relationships. We are in the body of Christ, going deeper in our relationships with one another so that we will be equipped and nurtured for intentional mission through our own lives. Part of our alignment with the mission of God is being aware of the people in our lives who are not connected to the faith community. We covered one way of being on mission in the gathering titled “Out” in Engage: Discipleship. We must be continually aware of the people in our lives.
Just as at the beginning of Engage: Discipleship, it is beneficial at the beginning of Engage: Mission to complete a simple inventory. Significant change often happens when we take stock of our lives and determine ways to take further action. First, using the categories of worship, Scripture, prayer, fellowship and breaking bread, complete the attached inventory.

**Note to Leader:** Please pass out copies of the *Five Practices of Christ’s Disciples Inventory*. Give group members time to fill out and have a whole group discussion on the answers.

**Prayer Reminder:** *Colossians 4:6* “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”

**Practice:** Choose one of the *Five Practices of Christ’s Disciples* that you feel you need to concentrate on more. Over the next two weeks, make a concerted effort to engage in that practice in a way you have never done before.
FIVE PRACTICES OF CHRIST’S DISCIPLES
INVENTORY

WORSHIP
In what ways does worship invite and equip you to join in God’s mission?
_________________________________________________________________________________

What specific act of worship challenges you to step out in faithful discipleship?
_________________________________________________________________________________

SCRIPTURE
In what ways do you hear God speak to you and inspire you through the Scriptures?
_________________________________________________________________________________

What significant insights have you learned about God’s vision for the world by reading and studying Scripture?
_________________________________________________________________________________

PRAYER
In what ways do you engage in prayer, both personally and within the community?
_________________________________________________________________________________

What other spiritual disciplines do you practice that guide you in cooperating with God?
_________________________________________________________________________________
FIVE PRACTICES OF CHRIST’S DISCIPLES
INVENTORY - 2

**FELLOWSHIP**
Where in the church do you receive support, encouragement and partnership for your ministry?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

In what ways does the church’s fellowship bring the community together for mission?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

**BREAKING BREAD**
What are your significant times for breaking bread and sharing around the tables at church?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

In what settings do you regularly break bread with the greater community outside the church?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
SESSION 2 – Part 1
GOD’S MISSION

Supplies:

Bibles

Check In: What practice did you choose to engage in over the past two weeks? Did you learn anything new?

Read Aloud: Luke 10:29-37 Go and Do Likewise

In the story of the Good Samaritan we learn that we do not need any special titles or training to do God’s mission in the world. We just need compassion and the courage to bring God’s love to others. All those “righteous” men of God (the priest and temple helper) should have helped the injured man based on their own teachings (“Love your neighbors as much as you love yourself” Luke 10:27). Rather, they worried that the man was dead and felt it more important to avoid a dead body (unclean to touch) than offer aid. The lesson of the Samaritan (who believed in God but would also have been unacceptable to the priests at the time) was that offering aid, God’s love and compassion was as natural to him as taking a breath. And so we pray it will be with us!

God’s mission is not a mystery waiting to be solved. God’s mission is fully revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Our lives are given abundance when we cooperate with God’s purposes. Our lives are given significance when we align our actions to Christ’s.

In what ways does this story proclaim God’s mission?

What part of this story speaks to you?
Have you ever been presented with an opportunity to help another person (physically, spiritually or emotionally) and decided not to? What made you hesitate?

When we engage Scripture together we come to understand that our God is a loving God. We see God’s love as a mission to rescue and reconcile broken people and a broken world. Facing the effects of Christendom is a more difficult challenge. Since Constantine declared the Roman Empire a Christian empire, Christianity has benefitted from being connected to the government or earthly power. Until recent history, we have benefitted from this relationship. Since people were showing up in our places of worship, we could remain inside the walls of our churches. Now that the larger community is not drawn to our churches, we must face daily how we are called to be the church in our community.

Reflect on the recent concentration on the initials WWJD—“What Would Jesus Do?” Only someone who knows little of Jesus would be stumped by that question. Those who do know Jesus and pose that question are perfectly aware that Jesus would love, forgive, bless, comfort, encourage, feed, pray, challenge, sacrifice, seek embrace and so on. This story of Jesus suggests that the initials GADL are much more appropriate—“Go and do likewise.” How do we align ourselves with God’s mission? Go and do likewise! And that’s the challenge.

Of the examples given above of “What Jesus Would Do” love, forgive, bless, comfort, encourage, feed, pray, challenge, sacrifice, seek and embrace, which ones are easiest for you? Which ones are more of a challenge?

**Prayer Reminder:** *Philippians 4:6* “Do not be anxious about anything but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God.”

**Practice:** Over the next two weeks, pay attention to who God puts in your path to aid, comfort or encourage. Take a step outside your comfort zone and offer God’s healing love as a true disciple of Christ!
SESSION 2 – Part 2  
GOD’S MISSION

**Supplies:**

Bibles

**Check In:** Who did God put in your path to aid, comfort or encourage over the past two weeks? If you don’t believe you encountered anyone, what steps do you need to take to see those around you more clearly?

**Read Aloud:** Isaiah 58:6-8 *What Pleases God?*

Have you ever considered this type of service of others to be worship to God? Why or why not?

In adding a new section called “Foundations of Presbyterian Polity” to the *Book of Order*, God’s mission now has the first word in the Presbyterian Church USA:

“The good news of the Gospel is that the triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—creates, redeems, sustains, rules and transforms all things and all people. This one living God, the Scriptures say, liberated the people of Israel from oppression and covenanted to be their God. By the power of the Spirit, this one living God is incarnate in Jesus Christ, who came to live in the world, die for the world and be raised again to new life. The Gospel of Jesus Christ announces the nearness of God’s kingdom, bringing good news to all who are impoverished, sight to all who are blind, freedom to all who are oppressed and proclaiming the Lord’s favor upon all creation.
The mission of God in Christ gives shape and substance to the life and work of the Church. In Christ, the Church participates in God’s mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God’s love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table and calling all people to discipleship in Christ. Human beings have no higher goal in life than to glorify and enjoy God now and forever, living in covenant fellowship with God and participating in God’s mission.”

Considering the explanation above about the “Gospel of Jesus Christ” does this fit with your understanding? Why or why not?

Have you ever considered Jesus to be on a “mission?” What was he trying to accomplish?

How do you enjoy God?

This gathering, in understanding the nature of God’s mission, explores a paradigm shift. Instead of seeing mission as just another activity of the church, we examine what it means to say that mission is the essential nature of the church. God calls, creates and empowers the church to continue the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ.

Just imagine: “The mission of God in Christ gives shape and substance to the life and work of the church!” The God who creates all things is on a mission to restore all things. God does not offer us a way to escape problems and sin of the world but calls us to cooperate with God’s mission of redeeming and rescuing all that is lost and broken. The Gospel of Mark begins with the breathtaking news of God’s kingdom: “the time is fulfilled,” Jesus said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe.” (Mark1:15). Led by the power of the Holy Spirit the church is launched into the same mission as that of our Lord Jesus Christ!

How does this make you feel?
In light of all that we have discussed, where is God’s kingdom? Who is welcome?

**Prayer Reminder:** Matthew 6:8-12 “...for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy **kingdom** come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.”

**Practice:** Over the next two weeks, enjoy God in a new way. Come prepared at our next gathering to share what you have experienced.
SESSION 2 – Part 3
GOD’S MISSION

Supplies:
Bibles
Copies of Mission Initiatives Questionnaire

Check In: What new way did you find to enjoy God? What was it like and what did you learn?

Read Aloud: Genesis 12:1-15 The Lord is a God of Gracious Blessing

The mission of God is revealed through the incarnational approach of God in Abraham, the people of Israel and the prophets. God uses people like you and me to accomplish God’s work of redemption and transformation. Abraham has a heart for God. Because Abraham steps out in faith, trusting God, there is a promise that he will be blessed: that he will know the fullness of life that comes in a relationship with God and that others will be blessed through him. In other words, through Abraham and his descendants, others will come to know the joy of living into God’s purposes. This blessing becomes the call of Israel. However, when the people fail to live in response to God’s blessing, the prophets continually call the people back to their purpose to be a blessing.

How have we as a church not been living as a blessing?

What can we do to change that?

We believe that God created a good and beautiful world. However, this beautiful creation is broken because the first humans decided that they would be better off being God rather than serving God. Humanity continues to choose selfishly and remains in brokenness. God takes on human flesh and blood to rescue us and show us the way into life’s purpose and meaning.
God is not content to leave us in our sin and to abandon creation in its brokenness. In a broken world God calls a broken, faithful man. Abraham is not perfect but he has a longing for God. In a world that is terribly broken and makes little sense, Abraham knows that there is a God reaching out to him. It is out of this experience of God that Abraham hears God’s call to leave all he knows for a land he does not know. And there is a promise tied to this call: that he and the people of the world will be blessed. The point of the blessing is that they will know the love of God and life’s meaning and purpose and they will have a community in which to grow up in a broken world.

Have you ever felt that you are unworthy or unskilled and thereby unable to be a blessing to the world? What does the lesson of Abraham tell us about that? What other biblical figures can you recall that were less than “perfect” yet still used by God?

As a congregation, we do not need to be “perfect” either. However, we do need to be honest with ourselves and constantly work to grow and adapt to serve the needs of our community and humanity at large.

**Note to Leader:** Please pass out a copy of Mission Initiatives Questionnaire to each member of your group and have a full group discussion. This is a brainstorming session, not meant to concentrate on one particular idea, but rather, get input from all about different ideas. This may be a sensitive conversation in your group because of recent cuts to our Outreach budget. We are currently not giving funding beyond local mission until we can recover financially. This could open a conversation about the importance of stewardship, tithing, and creating new sources of revenue in making it possible to carry out our discipleship. It will be important to keep the focus on living out our purpose and not condemning the Session and leadership seeking to make faithful financial decisions for the church. Leading your group to think of more hands on connections with the community that don’t require a lot of money would be especially helpful. Please write answers to each question and give a copy to Rev. Sue.
Prayer Reminder: Psalm 145:18 “The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”

Practice: Pick one of the ideas for a new Mission Initiative for our church that you feel excited about. Over the next two weeks, think about ways this idea may be able to be implemented. Think of the pros and cons of this idea and come prepared to discuss at the next meeting.
MISSION INITIATIVES QUESTIONNAIRE

• What challenges and confuses you about the community and culture outside the church?

• What do you think is challenging and confusing about your church to the outside community?

• What mission initiatives could help both church and community come to know each other?

• What has been instrumental in giving you a heart for God’s mission?

• What mission initiatives could be put in place to reach the hearts of others?

• In what ways is our church most effective in responding to the needs of people in our community?
Mission Initiatives Questionnaire

- What mission initiatives could be put in place to respond even further?

- What opportunities now exist for people within the church to step out in faith on God’s mission locally, nationally or globally?

- What mission initiatives could be put in place to provide even greater opportunities?
SESSION 2 – Part 4
GOD’S MISSION

Supplies:
Bibles
Access to Church Bulletin, Website & Facebook Page

NOTE TO SHEPHERD/LEADER: This meeting needs to take place at the church building. If you do not usually meet there, please plan ahead to book a room in the church for your group. Contact the church office to set the date and room.

Check In: What were your thoughts on the Mission Initiative that you chose? Is it a viable option for our church? If you believe it is, bring this idea to the appropriate committee of the church.

Read Aloud: Isaiah 56:7 A House of Prayer for All Peoples

The most amazing thing about this piece of scripture is that God is welcoming everyone to worship in his house, not just the Jews. In fact, the title of Chapter 56 is “All Nations Will be Part of God’s People.” For those of you who think that the Bible starts in the New Testament, here is just one instance where you see God’s consistency throughout all of scripture. He is a God who wants to be reconciled with all of His children, no matter where they are from; all are welcome in his house.

Can we say that all are welcome in God’s house that we are the stewards of at the moment, i.e. our church building? Do we make it difficult for people to find us, come to us or engage with us? How about just find a place to park or the bathroom? This next story is a cautionary tale for us all…
“In one church I served as pastor, friends came to town wishing to surprise me by showing up for worship. Needing to know the time for the worship services, they called the church at night but there was no answering machine. They looked in the Saturday newspaper but our church was not in the church listings. They searched the Internet but the church did not have a website. They drove by the church but the large sign in front merely listed the church’s name. They finally went up to the glassed-in entry hall and tried to look inside but the lights were not on. In desperation, they drove up and directed their car’s headlights into the building but they spotted nothing. Finally, after giving up on the surprise they called me for the time of worship. Within months of their visit, all of the above were in place at the church! It was a gift to see our church through their eyes.”

Intentionally or unintentionally our church’s beliefs, values, traditions and mission are being communicated in a variety of ways. Let’s take a fresh look at our church from the eyes of a visitor.

NOTE TO LEADER: Please take a tour of the interior and exterior of the church building with your group. As you walk around, lead them in a discussion of the following paragraph. Please take notes on all three paragraphs and give to Rev. Sue.

First, take a tour of our building and pay attention to what you see. It may be that you’ve been there so often you may have missed taking things in so really pay attention. If you were a first-time visitor at your church, what would catch your attention? What message would be communicated? What does the building itself communicate? What posters, publicity and pictures are on the walls? What are they seeking to communicate? What stories do they tell? Is the language easy to understand or are initials and code names used for those in the know? What may a newcomer’s first impression be about what your church is seeking to do?
Second, scrutinize the various print materials of your church. What does the Sunday morning worship bulletin communicate? Is it winsome and invitational? Is it user friendly, especially for someone who may be new to faith? What do the announcements communicate about the priorities of your church? Would someone reading your church newsletter feel welcomed to participate in the activities of the church? Would they know how to make contact with the appropriate program and person?

Third, how does social media impact your church’s mission? What impression does your church website make on someone who comes across it on the Internet? What will they discover about the mission of your church? What comes across as most important? Is your church taking advantage of sharing its mission on Facebook? Are the members connected through e-mail, Twitter and other social network sites? What may be a possible frontier for communicating God’s mission among the members, friends and greater community?

What one message does our church as a whole (building, print and social media) communicate to our community?

**Prayer Reminder:** 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

**Practice:** Pick one area that you noticed in your church tour that could use improvement (*building, website, newsletter, etc.*). Consider ways that it might be improved and make constructive suggestions to those in charge or better yet, help work on a solution together!
SESSION 3—PART 1
THE NEW NORMAL

Supplies:

Bibles
Cultural and Church Artifact (see Note to Leader)
Copies of Past vs. New Normal

Check In: What area of our church, that you saw needed improvement, did you concentrate on? What was your solution and what was the feedback?

Read Aloud: Romans 12:14-18 Paul Gives Mission Directives

In this passage in scripture, Paul gives directives to the church at Rome on how to live a Christian life and how to interact with non-believers.

Think of yourself as reading Paul’s letter for the first time. Which one of his directives would be most difficult for you and why? How can you work on overcoming that difficulty?

NOTE TO LEADER: Show an “artifact” of our culture that is not longer used (VCR tape, cassette tape, typewriter ribbon, dial telephone, etc.). Discuss what has replaced this artifact and why. Then show or talk about an “artifact” from our church that is no longer used or becoming outdated (paper newsletter, glass communion cups, communion tokens, felt boards, communion cards, etc.). Discuss why this artifact is no longer used.
Our culture has changed dramatically. People are not waking up on Sundays wondering which church to attend. Church is not on their radar. Even though people are spiritually hungry, many do not see the church as an answer to their spiritual longings. Therefore, we are called to live differently. We can no longer spend inordinate amounts of time trying to make our programs attractive for people outside the church. They simply are not going to show up! This is not to say, however, that we are not concerned with excellence!

Our denomination and churches are struggling to engage a radically changing culture. Statistics show that Americans are desperately searching spiritually but the church is not connecting with the people we are seeking to reach. We will look at how the culture around us has changed and how we can build bridges and engage with those seeking things that only God can satisfy and answer.

We all know people who say they are “spiritual” but have no interest in church. What do you think they’re searching for?

The culture is flowing right by the church as we focus on dwindling numbers and loss of influence and as we fight over how we can return to the “good old days.” The truth is that we can’t go backward; we have to look at what God is doing right now and at a way in which we should respond and engage the “new normal” in which we find ourselves.

What are some of the significant changes you have experienced in your life? What changes have you seen in the church—worship, education, involvement and mission?
To reach our culture, we will need to live in a different way. We are called to express the Christian faith in a new way.

**NOTE TO LEADER:** Hand out copies of Past vs. New Normal and have the following discussion.

Reflect on your understanding of the difference between the past and the new normal. Flesh out the contrasts by providing specific examples. For instance, ask: Where have you seen the contrast between being the expert and being a fellow journeyer?

**Prayer Reminder:** Isaiah 43:18-19 "Do not call to mind the former things, Or ponder things of the past. "Behold, I will do something new, Now it will spring forth; Will you not be aware of it?"

**Practice:** The Past vs. New Normal handout illustrates the importance of relationships. Spend time reflecting on your faith story and consider how your story and involvement in the congregation can help create the “New Normal” at FPCR.
## PAST vs. NEW NORMAL

<table>
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<th>Past</th>
<th>New Normal</th>
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SESSION 3—PART 2
THE NEW NORMAL

Supplies:

Bibles

Check In: As you reviewed the Past vs. New Normal handout, what ways do you think you can help create that New Normal at FPCR? Can you see the connection between what we’ve learned in Engage: Gospel and Engage: Discipleship? In what ways has our journey through those studies been important to creating the New Normal? The new normal isn’t really all that new, but rather a reclaiming of God’s priorities that are revealed throughout all of Scripture.

Read Aloud: Jonah Chapters 1-4  God Shows Mercy as an Entire City Repents (Read the story as a group assigning different parts: Narrator, Jonah, etc.)

Jonah the prophet provides a powerful example for us today. Jonah is called to bear witness to the people of Nineveh. God wants them to repent. God wants them to turn from their oppressive and immoral ways and trust the grace of God. From our childhood memories of Jonah, we know he is resistant. He ends up in the belly of a large fish because he has resisted God’s call. Our culture is very different from what many of us are familiar with and appreciate. We know we have a call to reach people who want nothing to do with us but we are hesitant to leave our churches and reach the people God wants us to reach.

Why are we hesitant to “reach people who want nothing to do with us?” What do we have to lose by trying?

As we follow Jonah into Nineveh, we find him a less-than-enthusiastic proclaimer. We see that his heart is not in this mission to reach the people of Nineveh. He does not want God to rescue a broken and lost
people. He does not want God to reach the people who have oppressed him and his people. But through his hesitant steps, the entire city repents. God’s work is accomplished. What good news!

If we put aside our fears and prejudices and actually proclaim the Good News to the world, what do you think the result might be? How can this affect individual lives?

But at the end of this story, we find that Jonah is not happy. He is more concerned about his own life and the death of a shade tree that kept the sun off him than with an entire city coming into a new relationship with God.

How have our steps into mission been hesitant steps? Do we rejoice in the people who come into a relationship with God because of our ministry?

Another feature in the new normal is an increasing shift from a print-dominated culture to an image- and story-dominated culture. A print-based, modernist view tends to be individualistic, objective, abstract, linear and rational. According to Shane Hipps in Flickering Pixels, “As image-based communication becomes dominant…it changes the way we think and determines what we think about. Images are not well suited to articulate arguments, categories or abstractions. They are far better for presenting impressions and concrete realities.” This new generation responds far better to stories and personal illustration than to rational, linear argument/apologetic.

In many ways the idea of an image- and story-dominated culture brings us back to the earliest proclamation of the gospel by Jesus and the apostles (parables!).

See! Jesus kingdom of God is like:

A great banquet that includes the crippled poor blind and lame
Listen! Jesus tells the following story when describing who God is and what God desires:

A father welcomes home a son and greets the future, not the past.

Imagine! The Revelation of John can only describe the indescribable in images:

The holy city—the new Jerusalem—descends from heaven radiant as a bride

What other stories did Jesus teach that taught an important lesson?

Communicating God’s mission within today’s image-based and story-dominated culture presents challenges but also opportunities. What current images and stories within our culture could help recruit disciples to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned and smooth the way for the oppressed? Just like Paul’s noticing a statue to an unknown god in Athens (Acts 17:23) and incorporating it into his preaching of the gospel, how can we notice in the images and stories around us ways to use them to engage people in God’s mission?

Prayer Reminder: Ephesians 6:18-19 “And I pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.”

Practice: Pay attention this week! Look for images and stories that speak to you of God’s expansive mission. It may be a photo, drawing, sketch, advertisement, label, logo or other visual. What image communicates redemption or reconciliation or transformation or new life or hope or forgiveness or resurrection? What contemporary story helps to communicate the magnificent story of God—the story of creation and redemption? Plan to discuss your findings at the next meeting!
SESSION 4—PART 1
DO OUR HEARTS BREAK OVER THE
THINGS THAT BREAK GOD’S HEART?

Supplies:

Bibles
DVD of Our Community??
Copy of George MacLeod Prayer

Check In:  What contemporary image or story did you find that communicated God’s expansive mission? Share with the group.

Show DVD of Our Community. Briefly discuss what these visuals tell us about our community.

Read Aloud:  Matthew 9:35-38  Jesus Sends Out Shepherds

Notice that as Jesus looks out over the crowds of people, he has compassion for them. In other words, his heart breaks for them.

His heart breaks because they are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Who are the harassed and helpless? Some are sick and dying. Others are fretting over their sick loved ones and despondent over the dying. Some are working as hard as they can to feed their children but their stomachs continue to growl. Others are trying to erase the pain of life through drugs and alcohol. Some are wondering if there is anything more to this existence than what meets the eye. Others wonder if they will ever have a place to call home.

Do you know someone who is facing similar struggles? If you feel comfortable, share their story with the group.
It’s interesting that they are harassed and helpless because they are like sheep without a shepherd. They are living in the midst of life’s problems and pain and they have no idea that there is a God who loves them, cares about them and will walk through any hardship with them with the light of hope. In the next three lessons we seek to become more familiar with our community and through prayer and discernment begin to identify the harassed and helpless in our community.

Instead of trying to figure out how the church can make a difference in the community, this is a time to pause and ask, “What is God already doing in our community that we can join God in doing?” In other words, “What breaks God’s heart in our neighborhood?” When we begin to get a sense of the things that break God’s heart, we begin to have a heart for the people around us.

Over whom is God’s heart breaking in our community?

Do your hearts break over the same people?

Read Aloud: Acts 17:16-34  Paul Proclaims Christ

As Paul walks around Athens, he becomes distressed over all the idols he sees. In other words, his heart breaks over all the ways people are trying to find and experience meaning and purpose in life that do not include the God who gives real and lasting life. Do we understand Paul’s anger over all the idols that he sees in Athens? In our culture things such as family, politics, money, possessions, time and even religion can become our idols. If we put our ultimate worth in something other than God, then that particular thing or person has taken the place of God in our lives.

What idols do you have in your life that take the place of God?

Why are they important to you?
Paul spent time with people in his culture; he did not spend all his time in the synagogue! It’s because he spent time with people in the community that he was invited to the Areopagus to speak about God. We must earn the right to be heard! While speaking in their meeting place, Paul is authentic and reverent. He shares his faith but does not make fun of their beliefs. He even affirms them as religious people. He tells them that he noticed one of their idols to an unknown god. He simply uses this idol to tell them about the God of creation and the resurrection.

When we bear witness to God’s transforming power in Christ, people will fall into three main groups: some will be turned off, some will want to know more and some will want to follow Jesus when they hear of his real and lasting life. The interesting thing about this passage is the names of these new followers: Damaris and Dionysius. These names don’t sound much like John and Mary. When we bear witness to God’s love in Jesus, we will reach people we never imagined we would reach. But to reach them, we must leave our church buildings. We are called to be the church in our communities.

**Note to Leader:** Hand out copies of the George MacLeod prayer. George was the founder of the Iona Community of Scotland and read this prayer at the dedication of the rebuilt Iona Abbey. Have the group read this prayer aloud in unison.

**Prayer Reminder:** 1 Chronicles 16:11 “Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.”

**Practice:** Over the next two weeks, as you go about your daily life in our community, notice things that “break God’s and your heart.” Be prepared to discuss at the next meeting.
GEORGE MACLEOD PRAYER

It is not just the interior of these walls, it is our own inner beings you have renewed.

We are your temple not made with hands.

We are your body.

If every wall should crumble, and every church decay, we are your habitation.

Nearer are you than breathing, closer than hands and feet.

Ours are the eyes with which you, in the mystery, look out in compassion on the world.

So we bless you for this place, for your directing of us, your redeeming of us and your indwelling.

Take us “outside the camp,” Lord, outside holiness, out to where soldiers gamble and thieves curse, and nations clash at the cross-roads of the world…

So shall this building continue to be justified.
SESSION 4—PART 2
DO OUR HEARTS BREAK OVER THE
THINGS THAT BREAK GOD’S HEART?

Supplies:
Bibles
Copies of:
Guide to Prayer-Walking and Observation in the Community
Guidelines for Community Observation
Community Observation Guide

Check In: Over the past two weeks, what did you observe that “broke God’s and your heart?”

Note to Leader: Leave plenty of time for discussion, questions and concerns about the Prayer Walk in this lesson.

Hand out copies of Guide to Prayer-Walking and Observation in the Community. Have someone read aloud the first three paragraphs (before Guidelines for Prayer-Walking).

Ask for general questions from the group. Note that more specifics will be given as we continue with this lesson.

When taking a prayer walk in the community, we need to remember to keep our eyes open to those around us. Jesus indicates that his disciples will discover him in the most unusual places.

Read Aloud: Matthew 25:31-46 When Did We See You?
To those who first heard Jesus’ words it came as a shock to discover that they had provided for other’s needs but didn’t see Jesus. In the same way they also had neglected the needs of others but didn’t realize it was Jesus they were neglecting. Their shock, of course, is that if they had only known it was Jesus, they would have responded differently. He would have received royal treatment.

What does this story tell us about God’s mission?

What does Jesus expect his disciples to do?

What should we be engaged in?

**Note to Leader:** Read Guidelines for Prayer-Walking, How Do You Pray? And Guidelines for Community Observation as well as review the Community Observation Guide. Have a full group discussion. If any questions come up that you can’t answer, please forward to Sue or Diane.

Have your group break up into teams of 2-3 people for the Prayer Walk. Have each group schedule a time for their Prayer Walk within the next two weeks *(before the next meeting)*. Walks should take place during the day.

Each group should choose the area they would like to walk. Note: DO NOT walk in your own neighborhood. Only one group for each location chosen. Sample locations are *(but not limited to)* Park Lake, Main Street *(different locations)*, the mall, Shop Rite, apartment complexes, ball/soccer fields *(while games are going on)*, shopping locations along Rte 46, or choose a neighborhood just off the main paths.

An invitation to take a Prayer Walk in the community may provoke more anxiety about the praying than about the actual walking. For those who feel tongue-tied about what to pray or fearful about not using the right prayer language, the author Anne LaMotte provides some valuable encouragement:
“So I pray constantly between bouts of trying to live life on life’s terms. Help. Thanks. Wow. I end most prayers with Amen, before my inevitable reentry into regular old so-called life, because for thousands of years believers and prophets have said to. So I do. It’s that simple. You’ve heard it said that when all else fails, follow instructions. So we breathe, try to slow down and pay attention, try to love and help God’s other children and—hardest of all, at least to me—learn to love our depressing, hilarious, mostly decent selves. We get thirsty people water, read to the very young and old and listen to the sad. We pickup litter and try to leave the world a slightly better place for our stay here. These are the basic instructions, to which I can add only: Amen.”

As you pay attention to your community, seeing perhaps with new eyes, invite prayers of “help,” thanks,” and “wow” to be on your lips and within your heart.

**Prayer Reminder:** *Psalm 65:1-2* In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.

**Practice:** Over the next two weeks, reflect on your life at this moment in time and express your prayers of help, thanks and wow. Be prepared to discuss how it felt to pray in this way.

Also, bring any notes you took from your Prayer Walk and be prepared to talk about it to the rest of the group.
GUIDE TO PRAYER-WALKING AND OBSERVATION
IN THE COMMUNITY

What is prayer-walking? One simple definition: “praying on-site with insight.” The purpose of prayer-walking is to seek God’s guidance, mercy and transforming power—both for the community and for ourselves as God’s servants in the community.

Become more aware of what you see while you walk and pray by connecting prayer-walking with structured observation (see guidelines for community observation on page 3). The discussion questions in the observation guide can help participants “debrief” after a prayer-walking experience.

Prayer-walking and observation can be a valuable tool for identifying needs, becoming more familiar with the community you will be serving and preparing project teams spiritually for the outreach.

Guidelines for Prayer-Walking

-- Walk in groups of two or three. Plan your routes ahead of time to cover as much of the area as possible.

-- Pray aloud in a quiet, conversational voice, if you feel comfortable doing so. Or pray silently, letting your prayer partner(s) know what you are praying about. Don’t call attention to yourselves. As the Waymakers website puts it, “You can be on the scene without making one.”

-- If anyone asks what you are doing, be prepared to respond: “We’re praying God’s blessing on this neighborhood. Is there any special way we can pray for you?”

-- Although it is not the primary purpose of prayer walking, be open to opportunities to interact with and bless people that may grow out of your experience. The Waymakers website explains the connection between prayer-walking and faith in action:

As you pray God’s promises with specific homes or work sites in view, you’ll find that hope for those people begins to grow. You’ll begin to see people as God might view them. You’ll likely find yourself becoming more interested in the welfare of the people you are praying for...Watch for the ways God impresses you to display his love in practical acts of kindness.
--Plan to walk for about half an hour.

--Afterwards, gather to share your prayers, observations and experiences. What did you learn about the neighborhood? How was God manifest in this experience?

--Encourage people to continue praying for the community during the week.

**How Do You Pray?**

Here are some pointers:

--*Pray for discernment*—Seek the gift of seeing the community through Christ’s “lens,” and to discern what God is already doing there; ask God to show you how you can pray with greater insight for the people, events and places in the community.

--*Pray for blessing*—Pray over every person, home and business you encounter; for God’s intervention in each life, so that each one can be fruitful in God’s kingdom; for God’s will to be done in this community “as it is in heaven” (Matt.6:10).

--*Pray with empathy*—See and feel what residents live with every day; offer intercession for those things that express brokenness and grieve God’s spirit and give thanks to God for the blessings and gifts that exist in the community.

--*Pray from Scripture*—Prayers based directly on God’s word can be especially powerful. You may want to bring a Bible with key passages highlighted or copy verses onto note cards.

--*Pray in God’s power*—allow times of silence for God’s spirit to speak to you or through you (Romans 8:26). Ask with confidence in the power of Jesus’ name (John 14:12-14). Like the disciples sent out by Christ, we are empowered to push back the darkness (Luke 10:17-18).
Guidelines for Community Observation

Even if you have been in a community for a long time, you can learn to see the familiar with new eyes, alert to indicators of need as well as signs of God’s reign.

Walk through as much of the community as you are able in about a half hour. Open your observation time by asking God to allow you to see with his eyes of love and discernment. You can combine observation with more in-depth prayer for the community.

Use the categories on the next page to organize your observations. Respect the dignity of community members by recording your notes as unobtrusively as possible. Be present as servants, not tourists!

After the visit take time to consider the following questions with your partner:

--What positive qualities, opportunities and benefits does the community have to offer? What are signs that God is already at work in the neighborhood? Identify potential partners (people, churches, organizations) that the church could come alongside in serving the community.

--What needs and concerns are evidence? What do you see that might detract from people’s quality of life or hinder people from developing their potential? What challenges are people likely to face as they go about their daily life?

--How might community residents view your congregation? Would you be perceived as allies, foreigners, friends, helpers, annoyances or simply irrelevant?

--Take note of your own response to what you see. What kinds of “vibes” do you get from your encounters in the community? What feels familiar or strange? Safe or dangerous? Friendly or hostile? Happy or sad? Pleasant or uncomfortable?

--Do you sense any barriers to “fitting in” between yourself and the community—language, culture, class, ethnicity, age? What stereotypes about people and places might you have to address to build healthy relationships with people here?

--How is the Good News of salvation through Christ relevant here? What might it look like if God’s kingdom were realized “on earth as it is in heaven” here in this community? Imagine how your congregation, working alongside members of the
community, might participate in helping the neighborhood experience God’s design for a good life.

--Did your prayerful observations spark any ideas for your ongoing ministry in this community? Identify how you could follow up with organizations or individuals in the community.

Close with a time of prayer for the neighborhood and for the congregation’s witness and service there.
COMMUNITY OBSERVATION GUIDE

Look for evidence of the following:

--People groups: Who is standing at bus stops, hanging out on street corners, going into businesses, playing in the park, waiting in line at the store? Note ages, ethnicities, languages and apparent economic status. How much do you see people interacting with one another? Remember the goal is to be seeking where God may be leading us to connect with our community. This is not a time to make judgments about people

--Places of activity: A pizza joint crowded with youth, a shopping plaza, a heavily trafficked intersection, playgrounds, school zones

--Structure: What are the types and conditions of the structures (homes, businesses, roads, parks)? What appears to be the quantity and quality of available services? Who is providing services and who is receiving them?

--Signs of change: Note which businesses are opening or closing and if housing is under construction, for sale or being demolished. Check for languages added to shop signs and buildings used in ways different from their original purpose. Overall, do conditions appear to be getting better or worse?

--Signs of hope: Where is there evidence of God’s grace and God’s people at work? Look for churches and nonprofit organizations, playing children, uplifting artwork, Christian symbols, social gatherings and gardens. Look especially for local assets that could be connected with neighborhood needs.

--Signs of need: Look for evidence of hardship, hurt or injustice. Is what you see specific to particular areas or affecting the neighborhood as a whole? Be aware that marginalized people and social problems are often hidden, especially in communities that appear well off. (Note to Sue: maybe this chart should be a separate page?)

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<th>Places of Activity</th>
<th>Structures</th>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Signs of Change</th>
<th>Signs of Hope</th>
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SESSION 4—PART 3
DO OUR HEARTS BREAK OVER THE
THINGS THAT BREAK GOD’S HEART?

Supplies:

Bibles

Check In: Over the past two weeks, how did it feel to pray the prayers of “Help,” “Thanks,” and “Wow?” Did you gain any new insight into your prayer life?

Read Aloud: Matthew 9:35-38 Jesus Sends Out Shepherds

As we revisit the scripture in Matthew that we first read at the beginning of this Session, how does your Prayer Walk influence the way you now see this passage?

Do you feel like you saw things that Jesus might have seen?

Who are the “workers” Jesus is speaking about?

We have experienced Prayer Walking in our neighborhoods. We have prayed for people in our community and have identified some of the things that break our hearts. We have experienced and prayed for broken people, families and communities. We have even seen the effects of our broken communities: poverty, racism and injustice.

Note to Leader: The rest of this lesson will be discussion about the Prayer Walks. Have each group report on their Prayer Walk. Listen carefully to their reports and ask follow up questions. Encourage other members of your group to ask questions. Take notes and send to Sue.
Make sure the following questions are answered:

What was it like praying along the streets of your neighborhood?

Did you have conversations with people? What was said?

What did you see that touched your heart and causes you concern?

What did you see that surprised or delighted you?

What breaks God’s heart in our neighborhood?

What brings joy to God’s heart?

What is God already doing in our community that we can join God in doing?

Did you get a good sense of the people living in the community and their needs?

What would you do differently the next time you take a Prayer Walk?

**Prayer Reminder:**  *Luke 6:12*  One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God.

**Practice:**  Consider any of the observations from the Prayer Walk that are breaking your heart or that you cannot seem to forget. Pray about these daily asking God to speak and guide you in how to respond.
SESSION 5—PART 1
LIVING AS MISSIONARIES

Supplies:

Bibles

Check In: Share a concern or image from the Prayer Walk that has been weighing heavy on your heart and you have been praying about. What do you feel God may be calling you to do?

In these gatherings, we have sought to become more aware of the need for our lives to be aligned with God’s mission. We know that we cannot go back to church simply to have our own needs met. We have encountered the biblical witness of God’s being on a loving mission to redeem, reconcile and rescue broken people and a broken world. We are becoming more aware that just as God sent Jesus to this world, Jesus is sending us on the same mission. Therefore, we are missionaries.

Paul provides a picture of our missionary calling.

Read Aloud the following translation of 2 Corinthians 5:14-20 from The Message. Paul says that we are God’s representatives on earth.

“Our firm decision is to work from this focused center: One man died for everyone. That puts everyone in the same boat. He included everyone in his death so that everyone could be included in his life, a resurrection life, a far better life than people ever lived on their own. Because of this decision we don’t evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at the Messiah that way once and got it all wrong, as you know...Now we look inside and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The
old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it! All this comes from God who settled the relationship between us and him and then called us to settle our relationships with one another...God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We’re Christ’s representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God’s work of making things right between them. We’re speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God: he’s already a friend with you.”

What do you think about this description of what it means to be a disciple?

Are you a friend with God?

As we explore what it means to be Christ’s representatives and to live out God’s reconciling love in our communities, we believe that being a missionary in our local context includes the following characteristics:

- As God identifies with us in all that it means to be human, we are called to identify with the people around us. This takes time. We are called to build relationships with people so that we know their ups and downs.

How do you feel about this concept? Are you already doing this?

- We are called to hang out with people where they live. That means spending time with them in their homes, where they play and serve, and where they shop and eat. This may require that we leave what is comfortable to us. We must address our fears!

What is comfortable for you? What is your fear about this?
• Missionaries are humble. We do not set ourselves up as the experts. We are open to the stories of people in their lives. We spend significant time getting to know them and understand how they find meaning in their lives.

Do you consider yourself humble in your faith? Or do you think what you believe is the only way to believe? How do you think others will perceive that?

• We cannot believe that we are bringing Jesus into their lives. God is already at work in their lives. We are called to see our lives as just one piece of what God has been doing to heal and reconcile a broken life and broken relationships.

Have you ever considered that God is working in the lives of non-believers, too?

• A missionary is willing to suffer with and for people?

Yikes! What do you think of this statement? What do you think that suffering will look like?

• A missionary speaks words of hope and comfort about a loving God who desires fullness of life for all God’s people?

Do you believe God’s message is one of hope? What is that message exactly?

Prayer Reminder: 1 Timothy 2:8 “I want people everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer without anger or disputing.”

Practice: During the next two weeks get to know someone you consider an “acquaintance” a little better. Call them on the phone for a short chat, invite them out to eat or to a movie. Understand that their answer may be “no” but accept it and move on. Be prepared to discuss how this went at your next meeting.
SESSION 5—PART 2
LIVING AS MISSIONARIES

Supplies:
Bibles
DVD—Missional Community Simple (3 min long)
Copies of a section of the Brief Statement of Faith

Check In: What acquaintance did you contact to try and get to know better? What did you do? What was the reaction?

Read Aloud: James 2:14-17 Faith By Itself Is Dead
What is the connection between faith in God and “good works?”

Note to Leader: Show the DVD—Missional Community Simple.
What were your thoughts on the video?
Can you understand the concept?
How is it different from what we are doing as a congregation now?

It’s interesting that when Bob comes to faith in Christ, he abandons his friends in the model airplane club. He spends all his time in church activities. He even invites his friends to church but they don’t come back.

So how does the church equip Bob to be a missionary in his circle of friends? In other words, how is the church equipping Bob to be with his friends in intentional ways so that through humility and pain and beauty of life, he is sharing with them the reconciling love of God?
Story from the author: “Another way of seeing our lives on mission is simply being open to inviting people into activities in which we already love to engage. One of the things I enjoyed about the church I served for sixteen years before accepting my present call to serve the denomination was that the men of the church would take off on backpacking trips twice a year. On one of our outings, we had a conversation about bringing unchurched friends on these trips. We talked about those who were not open to worship or Bible study but who loved to be out in the woods. So we started inviting friends who did not know the love of God in Jesus to join us on our trips. We did not change our activity but we included these men in our conversations and prayers. The experience of Scripture and prayer was never forced on them but the experience was open to them. They experienced “normal” men talking openly about the challenges of life and how trusting Jesus was making a significant difference in their lives.

One clergy couple we know has the gift of hospitality and preparing delicious meals. They decided to invite people into what they love doing: opening their home to others and sharing a meal. They walked their neighborhood and invited their neighbors over for a meal. All the neighbors would have to do is bring a side dish. On the day of the get-together, they had no idea how many of their neighbors would show up. They ended up with more than thirty people in their home for a meal and fellowship! They shared their lives and love of hospitality and made new friends. Some were already Christians but others were not.”

What do you enjoy doing? How could you invite people into the activities you already enjoy?

Those ordained as deacons, ruling elders and teaching elders in the PCUSA are asked to respond to nine questions during the ordination service. Imagine that you, as one called and equipped to carry out God’s mission, are also asked some of those questions. What do you understand about the promises you are making?
• Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church and through him believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

What does it mean to you to trust, acknowledge and believe?

• Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors and work for the reconciliation of the world?

In what ways do you hope to follow love and help reconcile?

• Do you promise to further the peace, unity and purity of the church?

What are some of the ways you hope to fulfill this promise?

Note to Leader: Pass out copies of Closing Section A Brief Statement of Faith and have group members read in unison.

Prayer Reminder: Ephesians 6:18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

Practice: The Brief Statement of Faith is written to be used liturgically, in other words, it can be prayed together or individually. Pray this segment often inviting God to speak to you through the words, guiding you on your journey as a missionary in our community.
CLOSING SECTION
A BRIEF STATEMENT OF FAITH

In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage

To pray without ceasing,

To witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,

To unmask idolatries in Church and culture,

To hear the voices of peoples long silenced,

And to work with others for justice, freedom and peace.

In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,

We strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks

And to live holy and joyful lives,

Even as we watch for God’s new heaven and new earth,

Praying, “Come, Lord Jesus!”
SECTION 6—PART 1
THE SENT COMMUNITY

Supplies:

Bibles

Check In: How has praying the segment from The Brief Statement of Faith since our last meeting made a difference in your life?

Read Aloud: 1 Thessalonians 5:13-18 Do The Will Of God

What is the most challenging part of this scripture for you? Why?

Even though we are separated by two millennia from those who first heard the call of Jesus—“Follow me!—our responses are identical to theirs—“Yes, Lord!” Resting in Jesus, our hearts yearn to express his love with others and share his continuing ministry.

Story from the author: “Welcoming the homeless into our church for a two-week period in the winter was the highlight of the year for a congregation I was fortunate to serve as pastor. Almost two thirds of the congregation was involved in some way in housing, feeding, clothing, guiding and simply sharing life with the 75-100 guests who stayed with us. Meals were prepared and we sat down to eat together. Evening activities were planned and we all joined in together. Perhaps more than at any other time the congregation was profoundly in touch with what God wanted us to do—to reach out in love to care for those in need and to help smooth the way in their struggles. The congregation’s heart for mission did not just happen. Ideas were shared, steps were made, risks were taken, leadership was tended, prayers were offered, priorities were made and God was thanked.”

What is the most important part of this story for you? Has our congregation ever responded this way to a need? Can we?
The church is called to do the work of Christ, to be the means of his action in and for the world…Mission, in its widest as well as its more focused senses, is what the church is there for. God intends to put the world to rights; he has dramatically launched this project through Jesus. Those who belong to Jesus are called, here and now, in the power of the Spirit, to be agents of that putting-to-rights purpose.

Read Aloud: Luke 10:1-12  Jesus Sends His Followers Into Mission

As we encounter Jesus’ instructions to his first followers, we realize that these instructions are applicable for our mission today.

- Jesus sends them out two by two. We are not sent out alone!
- Once again, we experience Jesus telling his followers that the harvest field is plentiful. There are people all around drowning because they do not know the love of God in Jesus or are bound by injustice.
- Jesus tells them not to take a purse or bag or sandals and not to greet anyone on the road. What strange advice until we realize that these were the same instructions given to the Jews on pilgrimage to worship God in the temple in Jerusalem. In other words, your service to others is directly connected to your praise and worship of God! Are we helping one another see that worship is not an end unto itself but that it’s about equipping and nurturing the body of Christ to serve people in our communities?
- Jesus teaches, “Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if anyone is there who share in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. In other words, if you meet people interested in who you are and the spirit of your life, then invest in them. Share life with them and give the Holy Spirit room to work in your works of service! In other words, mission takes time. Relationships take time. Remember, the body of Christ is equipping us for this mission.
• If you are not received, move on. Don’t sped your time endlessly debating your beliefs with people not open to who you are and what you are offering. And don’t take rejection personally!

In what ways is our church sending out people in mission in our community?

If it is not sending people out, what are some of the roadblocks our church is facing?

How can we overcome them?

A selection from Brian McLaren’s book *A New Kind of Christian*:

“For Christ, his “called ones” *(which is what the Greek term for “church” really means)* were also to be his sent ones. He trained those he called to follow him as apprentices so that they could be sent in his ongoing mission to teach his good news. In this line of thinking about the church, we don’t recruit people to be customers of our products or consumers of our religious program; we recruit them to be colleagues in our mission. The church doesn’t exist to satisfy the consumer demands of believers; the church exists to equip and mobilize men and women for God’s mission in the world.”

Does this description of “the church” agree with your definition? Why or why not?

**Prayer Remind:** Matthew 5:43-44 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

**Practice:** The 5 p.m. service has made a commitment to pray for our congregation each week as we seek God’s leading. Until we meet again, join in praying for God’s leading as we seek to discern where God is sending us. Pray that roadblocks will be broken down and the way be made clear.
SECTION 6—PART 2
THE SENT COMMUNITY

Supplies:
Bibles
DVD—Practical Examples (12 min)

Check In: Since our last meeting, you were asked to pray for God to guide our congregation. How does it feel to be joined together in prayer with others seeking to hear God’s voice?

Read Aloud: Acts 1:1-8

Do you feel that you have the Holy Spirit within you? How does it help you?

The PCUSA has a clear sense of purpose in being sent to do the work of Christ. Consider the following statement from the Book of Order:

“The Church is sent to be Christ’s faithful evangelist: making disciples of all nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; sharing with others a deep life of worship, prayer, fellowship and service; and participating in God’s mission to care for the needs of the sick, poor and lonely; to free people from sin, suffering and oppression; and to establish Christ’s just, loving and peaceable rule in the world.”

Does this sound like your definition of what the “church” should be?
**Note to Leader:** Show the DVD “Practical Examples” Tell the group that the two men in the video, Ray Jones and David Loleng, are the writers of the Engage curriculum. Ask the group for thoughts after it is shown and discuss the following questions:

What critical need could our community of faith address—poverty, homelessness, hunger, domestic violence? Something else?

Have you ever been teamed up with someone for mission and been sent to serve?

Is there someone in our church that you would like to team up with to do God’s work?

In *Engage: Discipleship*, we encountered the importance of spending more time in our spheres of influence to build more intentionally our relationships with people outside the church. As we continue to enter into our spheres of influence, it is also important to understand who lives in our community and to understand the needs of the community. Nothing can take the place of praying for and meeting people in your community.

Where are the gathering places for people in your community? Determine the place where you would like to spend time (*an hour or two*) this week discerning how God is already at work in the community and talking with people about life and faith.

Make plans to go with a partner to a location where people hang out in your community: a park, coffee shop, mall or restaurant. Maybe you already hang out in a place where people in the community gather. For example, if you are part of a sports league or coach in a league, then that could be your context to be with people and have a conversation around the needs and faith of people in the community. Make sure you
have a mission partner to go with you. Do not put pressure on yourself with this, trust that God will guide you.

Pray that God will lead you to someone to speak with. Greet them and introduce yourselves. Once you are in conversation with people in a particular gathering place, ask them if they have a few minutes to talk about the needs and religious attitudes of people in the community. Tell them which church you are from. If they are interested in talking with you, then ask the following questions:

What is the greatest need in this community and how can a church help meet this need?

When you hear the name “Jesus” what comes to mind for you?

When you hear the word “Christian” what’s the first thing that comes to mind?

Spend time in preparation with your mission partner. Share why you both feel led to talk with people in the spot you’ve chosen. Decide on the day in which you want to be part of discerning the needs of your community and what God is already doing there. Pray for each other as you are sent on this mission trip.

**Prayer Reminder for Your Mission Trip: Acts 1: 8 Then the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power!**

**Practice:** Your mission trip is your Practice. Spend time with your mission partner debriefing the experience and be prepared to share what you have learned with the group at your next meeting.
SECTION 7—PART 1
THE SENT COMMUNITY

Supplies:

Bibles

Read Aloud: Luke 4:16-19  God’s Kingdom Comes

This scripture tells us how Jesus began his ministry. The words Jesus read from Isaiah are his mission statement for his ministry to come.

Check In: Share the results of your Mission Trips. Note to Leader: Please take notes on the results and send to Sue.

Take some time to process your time spent in the community addressing the four questions with people who live there:

What are the needs of the community?

How can our church begin to address these needs?

Can we partner with other community agencies to meet these needs—for example, homeless shelters, foster-children ministries, housing ministries, soup kitchen, organizations preventing domestic abuse, ministries addressing human trafficking and so forth?

What ministry shifts need to happen in our life together in order to be a church that equips and nurtures people to follow Jesus into our own lives and the lives of people around us?

When we address questions like these, we become aware of the things we do well and those things we have left undone. To live more fully into the calling of Christ, we will examine three profound shifts in the life of a church’s thinking and behavior.
The first shift is moving from an *inward focus to an outward focus*. Many churches assume, “If we just did church better, they would come.” The church needs to intentionally engage its communities and culture. We need to see ourselves as missionaries to our communities. It’s important to understand that the church engages the community and the people outside of the church not in order to grow membership or to increase budgets so that it can continue to exist; it engages those outside of the church because loving outreach reflects the heart and mission of God. This is why the church exists!

The mission of God is that Christians are gathered in community for the purpose of being equipped and sent out into the world. One of the most missional things the church can do is simply to be the church. And simply put, the role of the church is to bless the world!

How do you see our church “blessing the world?”

The second shift that needs to take place is to move from a *program-development focus to a people-development focus*. Instead of focusing on programs, entertaining people or maintaining the institution, churches need to focus on developing vibrant and transformed disciples of Jesus. If we are honest, many of our churches in North America are program driven and have become vendors of religious goods and services that cater to our self-indulgent style of spirituality. There is a growing murmuring in our churches from people who are frustrated with their spiritual growth and who long for something more significant, real and transformative in their lives. This is not to say that we don’t need excellent programming but it means we need to shift from a program-driven church culture, which measures its value by the quality of its programs instead of the quality of its people. In terms of evangelism, the church not only needs to help people learn “how to talk” but also “how to walk.” Evangelism and outreach must come from an overflow of a vibrant, authentic, transformed relationship with Jesus. Unless the church is focusing on developing vibrant disciples, then the shift from being inwardly to outwardly focused will become another program of community service or outreach instead of an authentic expression of the culture and DNA of our church.
Do you feel that you are being equipped for evangelism and have opportunities for spiritual growth in our church? What else would help you?

The third shift is moving from an *institutional perspective to a spiritual perspective*. For example, session meetings are often simply business meetings instead of times where the focus is on spiritual growth. Discuss the following questions:

Are church leaders chosen based on their management and administrative ability or are they chosen because they are the spiritual leaders of the church? Another question to ask is how decisions are being made. Are decisions made simply by looking at the *Book of Order* or because “we have always done it this way,” or is the leadership of the church spending significant time in prayer and discernment, trying to hear the prompting of the Holy Spirit? Are decisions made primarily on how they help the church or institution or on how they help our community and those outside the church?

**Prayer Reminder:** Pray for the leadership of our congregation as they seek to follow where the Spirit is leading. Pray for our pastors, music director, cemetery sexton, elders, deacons, committee chair persons, and committee members.

**Practice:** Over the next two weeks, whenever you are in a Bible Study, church meeting or any church gathering and someone is asked to pray an opening or closing prayer, volunteer to pray! In order to change our church to a more “spiritual perspective” that change needs to happen in each one of us! Be prepared to speak about this experience at the next meeting.
Supplies:
Bibles

Check In: What was it like for you to volunteer to pray at a church gathering? If you didn’t do it, why did you hesitate?

Read Aloud: Matthew 5:13-14 You Are the Salt and Light

In his book “Present Future” Reggie McNeal notes that the reality is that “loving God and loving our neighbors cannot be fulfilled at church. Being salt and light cannot be experienced in a faith huddle.”

In what ways is our congregation a “faith huddle?” How can we fix that?

In our last lesson we learned about the three shifts that need to happen to make our church live more fully in the calling of Christ. What are some ways we can make those three shifts happen? Here are some examples:

Note to Leader: Have a discussion of these examples and then ask for actual ideas that can apply to our church, either from these lists or from participants. Write on newsprint or whiteboard. Record and send to Sue.

From an Inward to an Outward Focus

- Create prayer boxes throughout the community
- Commission teams to be missionaries to a specific neighborhood or apartment complex
- Pray for community and community leaders in worship service
• Adopt a school and serve it in any way you can
• Allow outside groups to use your church facilities
• Look for off-site venues to serve as ministry venues to engage your community
• Establish a 501(c)3 to target ministry opportunities in your community
• Have a testimony moment in worship services (this can also help make ministry shift on the next point).
• Avoid taking people away from their relationships outside church (that is, don’t over program people around church activities)
• Use technology as a way to connect with community, not just as a way to give information to your congregation
• Help people consume media in a way that encourages them to dialogue with those outside the church

From a Program-Development to a People-Development Focus:

• Do intentional debriefing with congregation members during the week and during worship (you might have a question of the week, such as “What worries you most this week?” or have people turn to one another during worship and describe the best thing that happened to them this week)
• Present ways people can apply information rather than just giving them information when you teach
• Help people find opportunities to grow through serving others
• Have a mentoring network in the church
• Use more time celebrating faith stories
• Have classes available to help people grow spiritually (as in disciplines) and in their biblical literacy.

From an Institutional Perspective to a Spiritual Perspective

• Spend less time on church business and more time on spiritual development for church leadership
• Shift from “committees” to “ministry teams”
• Spend more time in prayer with and for one another
Do prayer walks in the community

All disciples of Christ, in discerning what it means to love God and neighbor, are encouraged to pursue specific goals and set out particular steps. A mission plan not only helps us address challenges, successes and failures but through it we gain the courage and power to continue on Christ’s redemptive mission.

At the conclusion of Engage: Discipleship, the focus was on the creation of a personal discipleship plan. Now, at the conclusion of Engage: Mission, it is appropriate to create, fine-tune or reaffirm a mission plan for the congregation. In what ways are we making the transition from a church focused inwardly to one focused outwardly—to a community of faith in which each of us is being nurtured and equipped for God’s mission?

Note to Leader: Please record answers and send to Sue.

First, write down our church’s existing mission statement. Where will you find the mission statement published or posted—in weekly worship bulletin, the church newsletter, the church website or the entryway wall?

Second, indicate the ways the church is actively pursuing its mission statement. In what ways are you seeking to be faithful to God’s call and pursuing God’s mission?

Third, reflect on the following questions: How are we gathering? Are we gathering for the purpose of mission? Are we gathering to be equipped to reach people? Are we being mentored in the faith?

Fourth, remember the mission statement that Jesus chose as his own:

“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.” (Luke 4:18-19)
In what ways will you continue the earthly ministry of Jesus?

**Prayer Reminder:** Our mission statement is, “Growing in Faith, Growing in Love, Growing in Community.” Keep the statement with you when you pray asking that God will continue to guide you and our congregation on our journey of faith.

**Practice:** Take time to reflect on the ways you are growing in faith, growing in love, and growing in community. Write them down and consider ways that you can continue that growth.

**Looking Ahead:** Discuss plans for your final meeting and instruct participants to wear their crosses to that meeting.
LAST MEETING OF THE YEAR
Growing in Faith, Love and Community

Supplies:
Bibles
Copies of the group Covenant

Fellowship:  (Make this meeting a fun and different event for your group. Maybe a barbecue at a member’s house or a meal out at a restaurant. Think of a new venue for this meeting to shake things up a bit. Remember to pray over the meal.)

After Fellowship gather together for discussion.

Read Aloud:  Philippians 1:3-11, Love That Will Grow from The Message (MSG)

3-6 Every time you cross my mind, I break out in exclamations of thanks to God. Each exclamation is a trigger to prayer. I find myself praying for you with a glad heart. I am so pleased that you have continued on in this with us, believing and proclaiming God’s Message, from the day you heard it right up to the present. There has never been the slightest doubt in my mind that the God who started this great work in you would keep at it and bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Christ Jesus appears.

7-8 It’s not at all fanciful for me to think this way about you. My prayers and hopes have deep roots in reality. You have, after all, stuck with me all the way from the time I was thrown in jail, put on trial, and came out of it in one piece. All along you have experienced with me the most generous help from God. He knows how much I love and miss you these days. Sometimes I think I feel as strongly about you as Christ does!

9-11 So this is my prayer: that your love will flourish and that you will not only love much but well. Learn to love appropriately. You need to use
your head and test your feelings so that your love is sincere and intelligent, not sentimental gush. Live a lover’s life, circumspect and exemplary, a life Jesus will be proud of: bountiful in fruits from the soul, making Jesus Christ attractive to all, getting everyone involved in the glory and praise of God.”

The apostle Paul was one of the greatest evangelists, if not the greatest. His ministry followed an important pattern, he was filled with love and passion for proclaiming the good news of the Gospel. His love for God in Christ motivated him to share his story with those who would hear. He also understood that the communities of faith that he helped organized needed to constantly evaluate their ministry, always keeping God’s mission as their priority. He gave them tools for living together in community and guidance along the way; and he always celebrated the bountiful fruits the communities bore.

As we end this season of study about mission we are preparing to take a break from our group, but we have much to celebrate. Our study has not only helped us grow individually, but has contributed to the congregation as we continue on our New Beginnings journey.

Take time to name and celebrate areas of growth we have seen in our congregation. We have come a long way in the last three years. We have grown in our faith, and have sought to follow where God is leading us. The changes have created a more positive energy and have given us the courage to face some of the difficult challenges.

The information we have shared will inform the leadership of the congregation as we continue on this journey, but each of you are invited to remain a part of that journey. In addition to the annual Committee Work Day, there will be opportunities for you to be a part of the transformation. You can volunteer to get involved in a new area of ministry, serve on a committee or ministry team, participate in a Bible study and continue to participate in the small group ministry.

This is the last of the Engage curriculum, but this does not have to be the end of the small group program. As a group, share ideas for study topics
or activities you would like to explore. The Shepherds will take your suggestions as they work on the next phase of this ministry.

**Wrap Up:** What do you hope for yourself and for our congregation as we take a break for the summer? What do you intend to do to continue growing while the group is not meeting? Are there any prayer requests you’d like us to pray for in our closing prayer?

**Prayer:** *(Invite the group to hold their cross pendant in their hands as you pray together.)* God of love, you have given us the mission of sharing your good news. You have taught us that our story is part of your story and a gift that we can share. You have shown us that just as Jesus sent the disciples out to bring good news, we too are sent into the world. We have been challenged, and are still struggling to understand where you need us. We pray for your vision to see and your wisdom to discern where we are to go.

We lift up the concerns that we have named... *(list the prayer requests shared)*

As we end this time together we pray that you will fill us with your love so that wherever we go, we are missionaries of love and grace, joy and peace, justice and mercy. Amen.
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