



Session 1: What does it mean to be church?

Ice Breaker

Group Covenant

- I will be faithful to the process, take it seriously and engage it fully.
- I covenant to active listening, silent reflection and gentle but honest responses.
- I will safeguard the integrity and confidentiality of the group.
- I will pray for the group, its members, the church and its leadership daily.
- I will be part of the solution by being honest and vulnerable or silent.

Attendance Expectations

Part of our covenant with each other is to fully commit to participating in all the group sessions. We realize work and home sometimes get in the way. If you need childcare we will provide it. Some sessions will accommodate teleconferencing, although meeting in person is always preferred. If you need either of these options, or cannot make a meeting, please let your group leader know.

Opening Prayer

Scripture

John 13: 34-35

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Acts 2: 43-47

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Discussion Questions

1. When have you felt closest to God?
2. When you think of “church” in general, what images come to mind?
3. Why are you part of this church?
4. What does it mean to you to be “church” in this community?
5. Mike Piazza has said, *“Today people increasingly consume religion like another commodity. We are in danger of becoming spiritual tourists rather than pilgrims. That is one of the things implied when folks say ‘I’m spiritual but not religious.’”*

What does that statement mean and do you agree?

What are the implications for the future of our church?

What do we need to do to address this reality in a way that is nonjudgmental so that we can make “welcome” an active verb in our church?

Good News

Reflect on when God has been present in your life

“If God said, ‘Rumi pay homage to everything that has helped you enter my arms,’ there would not be one experience of my life, not one thought, not one feeling, nor any act, I would not bow to.”

— Rumi

Closing Prayer

O God, you have called the Church into being, and we have responded to your invitation. We now embark on a journey to rediscover your vision and our calling to be your body in this world. We know that this journey will change us; we open ourselves to that change. We know that this journey will challenge us; we lean on one another in these new days. We know that this journey will renew us; we look forward in hope for a new life.

Change our hearts O God, and renew a right spirit within us. Amen.



Session 2: What are the core values that make us unique as a church?

Ice Breaker

Opening Prayer

Scripture

Micah 6: 6-8

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Philippians 1: 3-11

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Discussion Questions

1. If someone were to describe who you are, what would they say?
2. What is most important to you in life? What do you value most?
3. If a guest visiting the church for the first time were to describe who the church is, or what are its values, or what it stands for, what would they say?
4. If a member were to describe who the church is, or what are its values, or what it stands for, what would they say?
5. What makes our church unique? What are the values we hold as foundational that no other church or organization in our community does?

Good News

Most people want to be good and want others to think of them as a good person; but rarely do we stop to consider what our personal core values are or what the core values of our church are. If we spent some time exploring these questions, would that help us make more visionary decisions, live more devoutly, love more fully those who are our "neighbors"?

With Our God by Dan Loewen © 2011

*What could I offer, what could I do?
What kind of worship pleases You?
A thousand songs or a hundred prayers?
There's more to be offered than noise in the air.*

You've showed me, Your desire, this is what You require.

*To act justly
To love mercy
To walk humbly
With my God
Let my life be
For your glory
Let the world see
Your great love.*

Closing Prayer



Session 3: What is God's vision for what our church may become?

Ice Breaker

Opening Prayer

Scripture

Isaiah 43: 18-19

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

1 Corinthians 12: 4-6, 12-26

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²²On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Visualization Exercise

Discussion Questions

1. What do you believe God wants our church to become? Where is God calling us to grow?
2. What new thing might God be doing in our midst that we have failed to recognize?
3. Society sees the church as a defender of the status quo. Are they right? What keeps us from being the midwives of the "new things" God seeks to do?
4. What gifts / talents / assets has God given our church that you think we are privileged to share with others?

Good News

We are a people who believe God is still speaking and acting and encouraging us to live up to our full potential. God dreams big dreams for us. Usually dreams that seem impossible.

We labor against what we believe are insurmountable odds. We question our suitability for the task. Surely, we think, God has made a mistake asking us to be involved or to lead. Everyone has, what I call, a "Moses moment" in life. A time when we make excuses, offer cogent argument, list logical reasons why we are not the ones to do what we know we are being called to do. We don't have the time, we don't have the resources, we don't have the skill, we just can't take the risk of failure, we just don't see ourselves as leaders.

The Bible is full of stories of heroes who question God's judgment in choosing them to accomplish anything. But, if we know anything about how God works, we realize what we see as great reasons not to do what we are being called to do; are the very reasons we have been chosen. If we could accomplish everything on our own, we wouldn't need faith, and there would be no opportunity for God to work in our lives.

I love the story of Gideon. (Judges 7) It's a war story, which is unfortunate imagery. But it's a great example of how God chooses an unlikely servant to accomplish something that seems impossible, using limited resources and unconventional tools. Your homework assignment is to read the story of Gideon and imagine your response if you were the one God chose for the task. Imagine God whispering to you – "Don't be afraid, I am with you."

Closing Prayer



Session 4: What are the needs of the community?

Ice Breaker

Opening Prayer

Scripture

Matthew 22: 34-40

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Matthew 28: 16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."^[a]

These passages are called "the Great Commandment" and "the Great Commission". One instructs us to love God and neighbor, the other commands us to invite others to become a disciple of Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. Which of the above two passages do you think our church does best?
2. Why do you think the other gets neglected?
3. What is the long-term impact of neglecting the one?
4. Who do you believe is the “neighbor” most neglected/marginalized in this community?
5. There is a large and growing group of “none’s” (usually young people, with no religious affiliation) in this community who still consider themselves spiritual but cannot relate to “church”. How do you think the church is an impediment to un-churched people experiencing God’s presence? How can our church become more a part of the solution in our community/world?

Good News

I saw a meme online recently that I can really relate to; it said:

“When I pray for God to move mountains, I must be prepared to wake up next to a shovel.”

So many times we pray and wait for miracles while God is waiting for us to realize that we are in fact the body of Christ in the world. We complain about injustice, poverty, hatred and the decline of the world. It seems so clear to us that God should intervene and fix it. The truth is God has intervened. God sent you. God depends on you to take up your cross (accept your assignment, your calling) and work together with the rest of the body of Christ to, with God’s help, bring the dominion of God on earth as it is in heaven.

Here Am I Lord

Hymn based on Isaiah 6:8

*Here I am Lord, It is I, Lord,
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart.*

Closing Prayer



Session 5: What is the mission of our church?

Ice Breaker

Opening Prayer

Scripture

Matthew 25: 34-40

³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Discussion Questions

1. What is the mission of your life?
2. How has that mission changed over time?
3. When you are unclear about what difference you can make in the world, what do you do?
4. What do you believe God is calling us as a church to do in our community? In our world?

Good News

If we are honest, there are times when we say quietly to ourselves or out loud – “I wish they would do something about that.” Or “Why doesn't the church do something about that?” Or perhaps we think to ourselves, “It just breaks my heart that _____ is happening and no one seems to care or want to help.” Have you ever considered that you might be the one the world is waiting for to “do something about that”? We can't all do everything, but each of us can do something to make a difference in the world.

“If I Were Brave” by Jana Stanfield © 2014

*What would I do if I knew that I could not fail?
If I believed, would the wind always fill up my sail?
How far would I go, what could I achieve – Trusting the hero in me?*

*What if we're all meant to do what we secretly dream?
What would you ask if you knew you could have anything?
Like the mighty oak sleeps in the heart of a seed
Are there miracles in you and me?*

*If I refuse to listen to the voice of fear
Would the voice of courage whisper in my ear?*

*If I were brave I'd walk the razor's edge
Where fools and dreamers dare to tread
And never lose faith, even when losing my way
What step would I take today if I were brave.*

Closing Prayer

○ Lord, let me live to be useful to you. Help me recognize your passion for good in my own life and give me the courage to allow you to use me up in your service. We ask that you pour out your creative blessing on our church and give us the courage to be fearless in your service.

Change our hearts ○ God and renew a right spirit within us. Amen.



Session 6: What is God calling us to do? Who is God calling us to become?

Ice Breaker

Pick a partner – someone you're not related to. Discuss the following questions and finish by praying for your partner – thank God for the gift of this person, what they bring to the life of the church and for what God is calling them to do or become.

What is your favorite story in the Bible?

How do you see yourself in that story?

How do you see our church in that story?

Scripture

Jeremiah 29: 11

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

Matthew 20: 26b-28

but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Discussion Questions

1. When was a time that you were certain of God's direction in your life?
2. What change is God suggesting for your life today?
3. Can you think of examples where an apparent failure turned out to be a great gift or opportunity? How might the church better encourage "experimenting" and risking "failures" in order to be more adaptive in a rapidly changing culture?
4. Jesus said, "The human one came to serve not to be served..." If our church is the body of Christ then this is our call too. Members sometimes

get upset when the church “doesn't meet their needs”. But if we are the body of Christ, whose needs should we be meeting? Whose needs are we meeting? Are things like how we worship designed for **our consumption**, or is it really a “service” for those who need to discover their place in God's family? What might need to shift if we are really to turn our focus outward and become a Servant of this community?

Good News

People everywhere have at least one thing in common. We hope that our lives have meaning beyond simple survival. We crave purpose. We hope our lives will somehow make a difference. Yet most of us get trapped in a life focused on things that don't really matter. A yearning for stuff that we believe will add comfort, security, and joy to our lives. Those of us who are religious begin early in life to bargain with God; trying to figure out the **least** we can do and still be acceptable. It's frequently not until late in life we find true joy in giving ourselves away in service to “the least of these.”

If we are lucky we find others, a congregation, determined to make the world a better place. A people trying to live into the dreams God has for them to create the dominion of God on Earth as it is in heaven. And, if we are wise, we begin early to teach our children this lesson.

Mike Piazza's final comments in his book, *The Vital Vintage Church*, speak to a bright future for churches like these.

“There is a fresh wind stirring in the church. Perhaps it is giving birth to new expressions, or maybe it is longing to revive vintage ones. I think it is both. What I know is that when the Spirit blows through our world in a fresh and powerful way, I want to be a part of a church that has trimmed our sails and is waiting.”

Be Thou My Vision

Dallan Forgaill, Ireland (6th Century)

*“Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art;
Thou my best thought, by day or by night;
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.”*

Closing Prayer