



Reconnecting our Churches with our Communities: Moving out into the community as Jesus did

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Fresh Expressions US



SESSION 1: HOW THE CHURCH CAN RECONNECT

What is really happening in our communities and the larger culture?
What are the implications for mission and ministry?

Together, we will explore how to better understand the cultural disconnection that the church faces, and see how other churches have found ways to reconnect with a changing world.



SESSION 2: ATTENDING TO THE COMMUNITY AROUND US

How do we reconnect with the community our church inhabits?
How can we take on a posture of curiosity that leads to unlocking new ways of connecting?

We will explore how "Contextual Intelligence" leads to mission and ministry that is more aligned to the changing culture. We will prepare to engage a practice of immersing and listening in our own communities.



SESSION 3: NEIGHBORHOOD LISTENING

What can we discover by observing and listening?
What does God want to show us?

Your church teams will spend some time in your own community practicing some of the principles we've been working on in previous sessions. You'll be bringing back your observations and reflections to our last session to consider what God might be revealing to you, and what that could mean for your church.



SESSION 4: WHAT ARE OUR UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES?

What are some natural connecting points for your congregation?
How might you be uniquely positioned to be a blessing in and among your community?

We will debrief what you have discovered in your exploratory listening session. We will explore some of your unique passions, assets, and opportunities. And we will explore possibilities for how the Spirit may be inviting you to enter into incarnational mission in your community.



FRIDAY AM: DWELLING IN THE WORD

2 Corinthians 5:16-20a (NRSV)

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, 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."

- What do you like about this passage?
- What surprises you about this passage?
- What troubles you about this passage?

- What do you notice about the ministry that God has given us?
- What is the role of an ambassador? What might it mean to be an ambassador of Christ? What might that look like concretely today?
- How are you convicted/challenged when you hear that God is making God's appeal through us?
- How are you encouraged/excited when you hear that God is making God's appeal through us?

- What is the Spirit inviting you to do/change/apply as a response to this Word?

PRAY:

After all in your group have had an opportunity to share about the passage, each person shares 1 personal request for prayer. Pray for one another briefly before group time ends.



SESSION 1: HOW THE CHURCH CAN RECONNECT

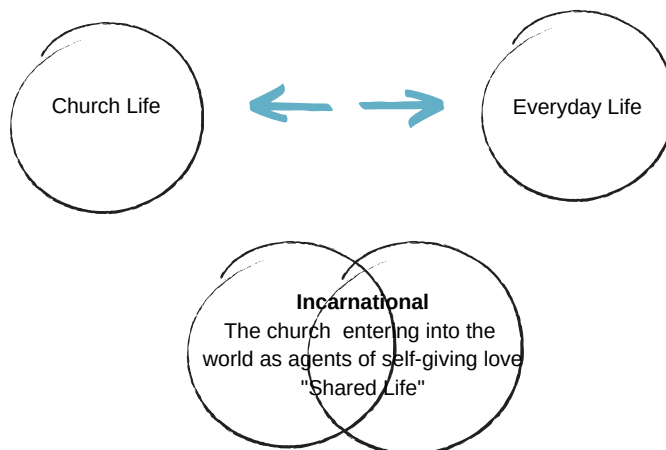
The Problem: An increasing disconnect between the church and the world around us.

There is a gap between the Incarnation and the way we do church.

2 Corinthians 5: 9-12

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.*

"The ways Jesus goes about loving and saving the world are personal; nothing disembodied, nothing abstract, nothing impersonal."--Eugene Peterson, "The Jesus Way"



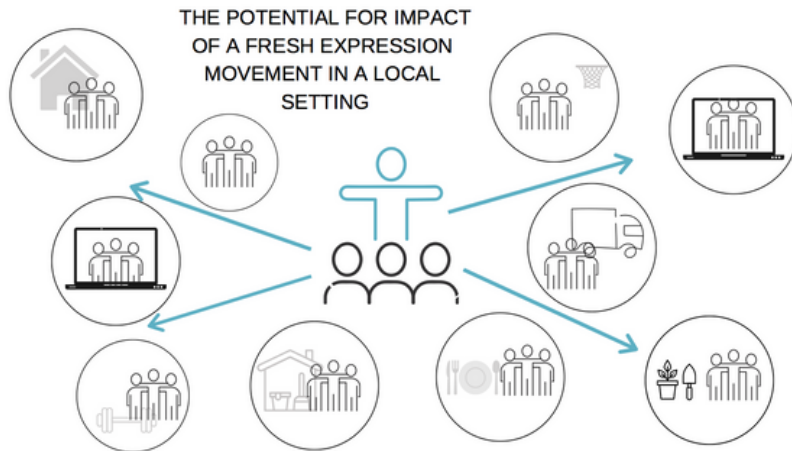
Incarnational: closes the "proximity gap."



Any Church can do this!

- Not dependent on a pastor
- Not dependent on a large congregation
- Not dependent on a large budget
- Not confined only to urban contexts

It takes seriously the everyday people of God and the natural connecting points you have with the networks, needs, and neighborhood of your local setting.





FRIDAY PM: DWELLING IN THE WORD

2 Corinthians 5:16-20 (The Message Version)

16-20 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. We certainly don't look at him that way anymore. 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 emerges! Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. 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 is the Spirit saying to you as you encounter this passage afresh (or anew)?
- What does it mean to you that we are Christ's representatives?
- Is our call to "persuade" people into belief, or into something else? What is the something else?
- What strikes you about this last phrase: "Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you?" What does that mean to you? What might that mean for a church on mission?



SATURDAY AM: DWELLING IN THE WORD

John 20:19-22 (NRSV)

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

- What do you like about this passage?
- What surprises you about this passage?
- What troubles you about this passage?

- What does it mean to you that Jesus met the disciples in their fear? What might it mean for you today? What might it mean for your church?
- What do you notice about Jesus' presence and posture?
- What does it mean that Jesus sends his disciples AS the Father has sent Jesus? What does it mean to you to be sent in this way? What does it mean for your church to be sent this way?

- What is the Spirit inviting you to do/change/apply as a response to this Word?

PRAY:

After all in your group have had an opportunity to share about the passage, each person shares 1 personal request for prayer. Pray for one another briefly before group time ends.



SESSION 2: ATTENDING TO THE COMMUNITY AROUND US

"Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply." --Stephen R. Covey
Listening for mission requires us to listen to understand...not listen to respond, fix, or target.

What is the value to listening deeply to our community and the culture around us?

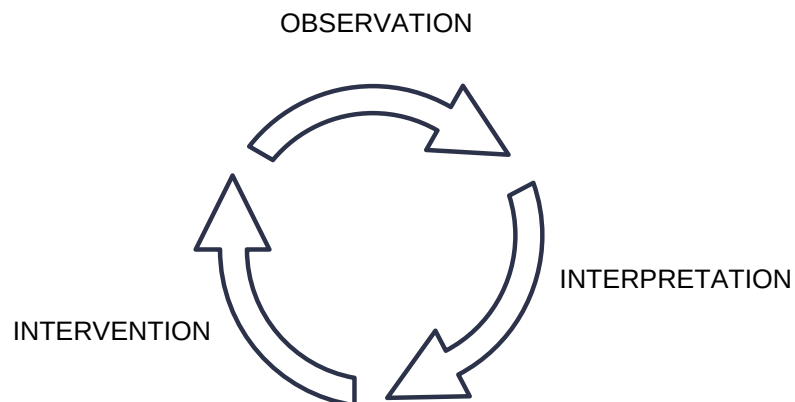
A posture of curiosity/listening/discovery

PRACTICING CURIOSITY, LISTENING, DISCOVERY:

What did this example reveal to you about this cultural moment?

What are the implications for the church?

What are the implications for mission?



OBSERVATION: What can I learn?

INTERPRETATION: What are the myriad of ways I can interpret what I've learned? How do I make meaning of my observations?

INTERVENTION: What is God uniquely inviting us to do to be an incarnational presence in the world, a sign and foretaste of the kingdom of God?



SESSION 3: NEIGHBORHOOD LISTENING

STRIP AWAY YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

Don't start with the assumption that you already know all about your community. Take the humble posture of learning and listening. You may want to pray before you strike out, asking for God to give you eyes to see and ears to hear what God wants to show you.

CHOOSE A LOCATION

Where do you need to go to pay attention and learn more?

Identify a place or multiple places in your community where you want to focus some time and energy observing, and if possible, interacting. It may be places you go regularly, but now commit to go with a heightened awareness and curiosity as you try to see the people there with new eyes. Or, it may be a place which is unfamiliar and you want to get to know.

WALK OR DRIVE OR BIKE AROUND

We suggest you go out in pairs and begin to notice basic things like...

- Who is here and who is not here?
- What do I notice about the rhythms or realities of this place?
- What flyers or signs do I see?
- Are people talking with each other or alone?
- What else?

Then begin to pay attention more deeply through observation, and perhaps, some casual conversations with people in the community:

- What do you notice people seem to care about?
- What do you notice people don't seem to care about?
- Where do you notice or hear or see the laments of the community?
- What do you hear your community longing for?
- Where do you see evidence of your community celebrating/appreciating and what are they celebrating/appreciating?
- What are natural connecting points or places in your community?
- What are evidences of isolation and disconnection in your community?

PRAY AS YOU GO

Pray for the people you see, the businesses you pass, the servers who take care of you, the situations you pass by. Prayer does not have to be a bow-your-head, talk-in-big-church-words kind of experience. Pray aloud if you wish, or pray silently if you prefer. Pray as you notice things on the ground, children playing, workers working, cars driving by. You can even offer to pray with someone if the opportunity presents itself. This takes some discernment and thoughtful reading of social cues, but if the Spirit prompts you to offer to pray with someone...take a chance and do it.

FOSTER CONVERSATION

Try asking curious questions if the opportunity arises for a conversation with someone.

- What's it like to be...a mom, a farmer, a waiter, a bartender, a senior citizen...in this community?
- What would make this community better?
- What do you really love about this community?
- What brings people together in our community?
- What are some of the biggest challenges you face in our community?
- What could increase the joy, fun, community, connection, or belonging in our town?

HOW TO KEEP LISTENING AND OBSERVING AFTER THIS MEETING

Observe and participate in an online community: Follow a Facebook group, join Nextdoor neighborhood, etc. If you are on Facebook, go to groups and then search near you. In a quick search of Montana groups, I found all kinds of groups depending on interest area, and this is just a few of the options out there:

- Montana-tude
- Montana free stuff
- Montana gardeners community
- Moms Mingle Montana
- Montana Rail Fans
- Foraging Montana
- Montana River People
- Montana Off Road

As you listen in the digital networks, what can you discover. Pay attention to:

- What are the hot topics of the community?
- Where do you see support and encouragement?
- What creates and fosters connection among this community?
- What are the common hopes and fears among this community?
- What does this group reveal to you about your community?

Continue to prayer walk/drive in your community: Develop a rhythm each week of praying and connecting in your community. If a handful of people from your church are committed to doing this same practice, develop a time where you share what you're hearing, reflect on common themes that are emerging, pay attention to what or who is breaking your heart, and pray for God to guide you to your unique opportunities for mission.



SESSION 4: WHAT ARE OUR UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES?

DEBRIEF:

What did you discover as you focused on paying attention in your community?

What surprised you?

What encouraged you?

What broke your heart?

Where did you see signs that God is already present in your community?

Where did you see pain points in the community?

If the good news of the gospel were to be embodied here, what would actually feel like/taste like/look like good news among to the people or a subculture of people in my community?

DISCOVERING YOUR UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES:

There is no need to compete with other churches or try to be something you are not. Build on who you are and what you have.

What are your passions? *Cooking? Off-roading? Hiking? Movies? Baseball? Card games? Volunteering?*

What do you know that could be a connection point with your community? *Fixing stuff? Parenting preschoolers? Making flies for fly-fishing? Creating a family budget?*

Who do you know? *Where are your networks of connection outside of church that you already have?*

What do you have? *A bonfire field, a group of retirees with a lot of free time, an old barn, a basketball hoop in a church parking lot, access to a church kitchen, etc.*

How might you address a pain point or longing in your community with your unique qualities/skills/resources?

And how could this be a ministry WITH people, not just TO or FOR people?

2 Corinthians 5: 9-12

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.