

OPEN DOORS NEW FUTURES MISSION SEARCH

CONGREGATION HANDBOOK



What does God want to do here?

SIGNS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Spiritual discernment is a prayerful, informed, and intentional effort to distinguish God’s voice from others that influence us, that the Kingdom might come and God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven. The goal of spiritual discernment is to receive God’s guidance.

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|---|---|
| PEACE | The pre-eminent sign: a sense of confidence at a very deep level indicates we are moving in the right direction. As a group considers an issue, the members will feel permeated with this peace as they approach God’s perspective on the matter before them. God’s peace does not preclude struggle. Pretending to agree can create an illusion of harmony and peace. Such apparent consonance is weak, superficial and will not last. Turbulence and turmoil are likely in early stages of discernment. The peace of God is born of bold searching, honest expression, mutual respect and genuine compassion. Ultimately the power of God’s truth and love brings serenity and a sense of well-being. |
| CONVERGENCE | Various things that occurred independently and at different times, that heretofore had not seemed inter-related, all of a sudden converge and fit together, informing one another. A pattern emerges like pieces of a mosaic coming together. |
| PERSISTENCE | The same message keeps coming through unrelated channels and in different ways. |
| FRUITFULNESS | When certain endeavors produce abundant fruit, God may be calling us to cultivate those areas further. |
| DISORIENTATION <i>(followed by a sense of clarity)</i> | This occurs when a previous comprehension of truth gets shaken up and a higher truth falls into place with a sudden sense of unanticipated clarity. Suddenly, something significant becomes clear in a vivid way. |
| JOY | Radiance swells up from within those who are engaged and the Holy Spirit extends a sense of elation. |
| ENERGY | If we are getting the message right, we are infused with the energy to act on it. |

The Holy Spirit, whom God will send in my name, will teach you everything.
John 14:26

Farnham, Suzanne G., Stephen A. Hull, R. Taylor McLean. *Grounded in God: Listening Hearts Discernment for Group Deliberations*, Revised Edition. Morehouse Publishing. 1996.

INTRODUCTION

May your kingdom come. May your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Matthew 6:10

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Jeremiah 29:11

Does your congregation long for growth? Are you worried about your church’s survival? Are you mystified that what used to work just doesn’t anymore? The church has been here before. In times of change, or crisis, we turn to our spiritual traditions to lead us. We pray that the Holy Spirit will respond, bringing in new life and hope for the future.

Welcome to the spiritual journey of Open Doors New Futures! In every new call a congregation needs time to review the past and explore ways forward into the future. The primary goal of the Open Doors New Futures Mission Search is learning and discerning God’s will for your ministry together. Previously, we did this in the self-study and vision work in the interim time prior to a call. With a shortened search process, we have moved this work to be done after a congregation’s call and include the new clergy partner. This allows a congregation to fold in the insights and capacities of the new clergy partner into the work of developing the vision, the story telling, and relationship building that is at the heart of the Open Doors New Futures process. God is calling you together as priest and people into love and service, to one another, and to the world that God loves, starting with your neighbors.

You are about to embark on a spiritual journey together as a congregation. Spiritual discernment as a church community involves opening our hearts and minds, collecting all the best information about our neighborhood, praying each step of the way, engaging scriptural learning, and spending time listening with friends and strangers, all of which provide experiences for the Holy Spirit to speak through. God will bring you to a place of inspiration and refreshed purpose, new people to love and new life together. All this is what makes Open Doors New Futures Mission Search a journey of spiritual discernment and brings new life to congregations by building neighborhood love and connection.

The Open Doors New Futures Mission Search takes about six months to a year to complete, beginning 3-4 months after the arrival of your new clergy partner and continuing at a pace that *serves the congregation*. The Congregation Handbook allows congregations to keep continuity during breaks in the process and builds group insight and inspiration as you go. Each event in the process builds on the previous events. Community learning is cumulative, and inspiration grows throughout the process!

KEY INFORMATION

Onboarding is when the leadership and congregation share information, build relationships through a process of sharing stories with one another about your life and your church, while discovering new information and growing in knowledge and love. These intentional experiences provide opportunities for your priest to share themselves as teacher, pastor, preacher, and leader while building love, trust, and respect for one another as you discern God's call together.

Visioning is discerning God's call through neighborhood engagement, scripture study and prayer that results in a vision of growing the congregation's current mission in God's call to love and serve using the tools and events of the Open Doors New Futures mission search.

Open Doors New Futures Mission Search is a process that typically begins in the first three to four months after a new ministry starts, typically takes a year or less, and includes five data and knowledge gathering events. The learning is cumulative as each event builds on one another. The prayer and discernment of the congregation, priest, and people and the discernment of the Holy Spirit's leading give the basic information you need to create a 5-year plan.

The **Mission Search Team**: A successful Open Doors New Futures process needs a team with a variety of skills to make it doable, enjoyable, and a spiritually uplifting experience. We have discovered special roles you may appoint for a successful Open Doors New Futures Mission Search! The Administrator, Scribe, Champion, and Prayer Choir work with the Clergy and Consultant to make the events happen. Many hands make light work.

What does God want to do here? It's the central question in a life of faith. Many churches are mystified that what they used to do no longer works. While we know that, we don't know what to do differently. We are in between the past and the future. In Open Doors New Futures, through multi-level conversations within a church, and in dialog with its community, God's leading into the future emerges. God speaks to us in our experiences of community exploration, with sparked imagination in conversation, prayer, scripture study, and compassionate listening, opening possible partnerships and new directions. God brings these pieces together into a new pattern specific to each church and calls the congregation into its new future mission. No two will be exactly alike. When we truly seek to discern God's desire, heaven and earth will move to see it done, and it is wonderful to be a part of God's love and flow of abundance in the engaged world around us.

Discernment asks us to lean into God, embracing an attitude of heart that moves:

- from knowing to unknowing,
- from advocating to attending,
- from striving to surrender.

Churches are at different starting points. For some congregations it's simply a new day, a new chapter with a new clergy call and lots of new energy. For other churches with declining membership and funds, there may be a feeling of anxiety and loss of purpose with all the energy going to keeping the church and the buildings open. For still others there is an experience of disconnection with younger people and a loss as to how to reach them. The pandemic left many congregations facing a slow return of parishioners. The Open Doors New Futures Mission Search gathers these facts and addresses them directly. Through neighborhood observation, conversation, and connection, new relationships emerge with new ideas, energy, and investment in the life-giving role of the church in the community. With the leading of the Holy Spirit carrying us forward, God's desire for what needs to happen, to love God and the world God made, becomes clear in learning, listening and discerning together. It is a deeply spiritual experience.

KEY INFORMATION (CONTINUED)

Where have we been and what affects where we are going? The church that followed World War II had a clear and widely shared mission within the community: to restore an entire generation from wartime to peacetime and provide places of healing and reconciliation. The church helped people to carry the personal costs of war, a place to give back the stories of war to the community that sent them, easing the individual cost by taking on the burdens of memory. The church developed many strategies to help the young men and women and the families they built, to carry these burdens providing support, healing, community and a solid sense of a good future.

The vast network of Sunday schools, Christian education professionals, youth groups, men and women's groups, adult education all flourished in support of the mission of restoring people from war. Churches undertook religious education that emphasized peace and understanding. The rebuilding of the world was taken on with the same community fervor and bonding with which they went to war. Ecumenism and interfaith dialogues began, and young Americans fanned out across the globe in service to the "least of these" to rebuild the world. The hope of a world where the horror of WWII would never happen again united the land. It was a mighty, life-giving mission. It ended in the early 1980s, when the last of the boomers graduated from High School, and deep community connections began to fray.

We no longer share a universally understood mission in our communities with inter-dependencies that cross ages, class, race and geography. However, we continue to use the post WWII mission strategies of Sunday school, youth groups, and adult education, all mostly pinned to Sunday morning. Strategies and models are not a mission in themselves. Without a mission focus, that develops strategies to further the mission and mutually build up church and community, churches lose community connection and relevance. The internally focused, maintenance based church develops in this lost community relationship gap. A transactional service provision model with fundraising and a "butts in the pews" focus develops that is not life giving, internally or externally. Maintenance is not mission.

Some churches started to recognize loss of momentum in the 1990s and 2000s and developed internally focused mission statements without community engagement. Full of good words but without the external relationships necessary to bring them to life, many of those mission statements are gathering dust. The church is the institution that exists not for itself alone, but to serve the world God loves. The church loses transformational or redemptive potential when we abandon community mission focus. We are blessed to be a blessing, not to be blessing hoarders. It may mean letting go, or putting aside some "traditional ministries" as we've "always done them" since WWII, and opening up to adaptation, fresh expressions, and new life. Discernment of God's vision tuned to today's community mission needs, brings clarity and joy. We know why we do what we do, and are active and willing partners with God.

The community distance and church isolation is what gave rise to the development of Open Doors New Futures. The church is not the only institution that is struggling. There's a acronym for the state of struggle: **VUCA**. See the explanation on the next page, and see if it describes your experience in the last several years.

VUCA

| <u>V</u> olatile | <u>U</u> ncertain | | <u>C</u> omplex | <u>A</u> mbiguous |
|---|---|--|---|--|
| The environment demands you react quickly to ongoing changes that are unpredictable and out of your control | The environment requires you to take action without certainty | | The environment is dynamic, with many interdependencies | The environment is unfamiliar, outside of your expertise |

There is a corresponding use of the acronym VUCA that opens ways forward.

| | | |
|-------------------|---|-----------------------|
| <u>V</u> olatile | → | <u>V</u> ision |
| <u>U</u> ncertain | → | <u>U</u> nderstanding |
| <u>C</u> omplex | → | <u>C</u> larity |
| <u>A</u> mbiguous | → | <u>A</u> gility |

To have purposeful movement in a **volatile** setting, **vision** is needed. In the ocean amid big waves (volatility) if you can see land, you have your direction. Vision provides the “land,” or future you are headed towards and determines your path.

Uncertainty arises in the **understanding** gap and occurs when the people inside the church do not understand the experience of the community outside and around the church. Speaking with neighbors and partners in the community surrounding the church builds understanding and reduces uncertainty. We aren’t guessing or assuming; we have direct information.

Clarity helps reduce **complexity**. The glut of information, overscheduled people, and a 24-hour news cycle that rarely has a break in bad news increases our sense of complexity and overwhelm. Past solutions frequently don’t work today, and yet we still do them with fewer people and without the results we desire. As we gain knowledge about our actual neighbors, clarity of direction and decisions increase, and what to do in ministry based in relationships becomes easier.

Ambiguity is the experience of knowing what we once did no longer speaks in powerful ways to our neighbors, and we do not yet know what will. God is generous and there are many ways to serve our neighbors. **Agility** is the ability to meet needs in a variety of ways and embrace experimentation with new ideas. Developing agility in responding to change will help the church community stay connected to their neighbors’ needs and God’s presence in real and transformative ways.

We all have recent experience of the church’s ability to pivot and respond with agility during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Open Doors New Futures process helps build thoughtful agility without crisis.

The spiritual journey of Open Doors New Futures helps congregations address the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity present in the world, their church, and the lives of your neighbors. Through parishes exploring their neighborhoods, churches build love, understanding, and connection with their neighbors, seeing their lives with fresh eyes. When the church invites the neighborhood into discernment, people experience the church hearing and responding to the real issues impacting their lives. The parish gains new insight, connections, and inspiration, and new vision emerges. Engaging the emerging vision builds discernment and clarity of God’s leading.

Therefore, do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Matthew 6:31-33

HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

Bring your Handbook to events and debriefs. There is room for journaling, drawing, and note-taking to aid parishioners in their contribution in discerning God's call. The people and roles noted in italics are those who are invited to each event. Listen deeply and pray with what you learn at each event. Listen for love and follow joy as you go!

Before you start:

We are not alone! To see how other churches are entering exploration and discernment of God's leading, watch this webinar:



Scan the QR code or click here to watch webinar on Faithful Innovation (Start at 3:45 and end at 51:35).



Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Romans 12:9-13

OPEN DOORS NEW FUTURES

DATA & KNOWLEDGE COLLECTION EVENTS

EVENT ONE: Living History

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

Hebrews 12:1-3

Goals:

- To engage the whole congregation in telling their stories and the story of the church.
- To identify the places of power and health where the Holy Spirit has acted powerfully in the past.
- To identify patterns or places of difficulty that might entangle God's vision as it emerges.

Date: ____/____/____ (2-3 hours)

The whole congregation is invited to attend and contribute, Clergy, Mission Search team, and Consultant.

Telling your story together, congregations will explore their experience of world history, parishioners' personal stories, and the parish engaging the changes of the 20th and/or 21st-centuries. Your new clergy partner will learn about your history in depth from parishioners and will be better prepared to lead with understanding going forward. In the debrief, parishioners will explore the places of power where the Holy Spirit has led them before for inspiration and revisit places of difficulty that might entangle God's vision as it emerges. The session will end with a summary of the important things you have learned that need to be carried forward in your discernment.

As you work together on your history take time to listen and discern. If you come to history that is difficult to talk about, slow down and use the Discernment Listening Guidelines in Appendix A.

Event Notes:

Important information, insights and inspiration. Connections, patterns, alignment with previous discernment and events.

What needs to be carried forward?

What Signs of the Holy Spirit are you noticing?

Follow-up

EVENT TWO: Neighborhood Exploration & Debrief

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Romans 12: 2

Goals:

- To identify changes and developments using demographic data study of the Mission Insight Report for your church's neighborhood or town
- To use the Neighborhood Conversations, Prayer Walks, and debrief to explore town or neighborhood changes, who is present there and what their concerns are through walking, praying, and engaging with our neighbors
- To seek signs of God's presence and to listen for mission and ministry that the congregation is being called to engage

Neighborhood Exploration consists of three different activities: Starting with a discussion of the latest demographic information on the neighborhoods around your parish in the **Mission Insight Report** (available from the Congregational Support Office), you will engage in an exploration of your neighborhood through demographic information, paying attention to how your area is growing, changing and what are the concerns of the people who live there. The **Neighborhood Prayer Walk** includes walking and praying through the surrounding neighborhoods and gathering places where parishioners prayerfully ask God to show them what God wishes them to see. The **Neighborhood Conversations** engage neighbors in short, structured conversations with three questions to hear their thoughts and experience of your neighborhood.

Part One: Neighborhood Demographics Discussion

Date: ___/___/___ (One hour)

Clergy, Vestry, Mission Search Team, and Congregation

Often done during coffee hour or morning forum. The report supplies data for a parish discussion of the present demographics of the neighborhood prior to Neighborhood Prayer Walks and Conversations. Discuss the Mission Insight demographic data and what it might mean for your congregation's ministry.

My pre-work before event: Download the Mission Insight Report file from your church communication. **(It must be downloaded to open!)** Explore the data and information. To find out more about any data point, hover your cursor over the point and more information will open. Consider the questions below. Make notes of what stands out for you. Bring your notes to the Mission Insight Report discussion. If you do not own a computer, connect with someone who does, share a cup of something good, and explore the data together, consider the following questions, and be prepared to discuss together the following Sunday the questions on the next page.

Neighborhood Demographics Discussion Notes:

What has changed?

What surprises you?

Describe the average person in your neighborhood/town according to the data.

Are the people living in our neighborhood/town represented in our church?

What might be the worries or aspirations of people living in our neighborhood/town?

Part Two: Neighborhood Prayer Walks

(occurs simultaneously with Neighborhood Conversations)

Date: ____/____/____ (1 week window, 1 hour walk)

A prayerful walk through the parish neighborhoods asking God to direct your observations, thoughts, and prayers while taking notes and photographs. Use the Neighborhood Prayer Walk directions found on the following pages. Send photographs to the designated coordinator for viewing as a group.

My pre-work before event: Clarify where in your neighborhood/town you will be Prayer Walking. A map will be available from the Mission Search Team.

Photo coordinator name and email: _____

Part Two: Neighborhood Conversations

(occurs simultaneously with Neighborhood Prayer Walks)

Date: ____/____/____ (1 week window)

Walking through the neighborhoods of the parish, participants will engage three people in conversation around the three questions. Record the answers after your conversations. When you have finished your three conversations, take a photo and send the answers in your booklet directly to the Neighborhood Conversations point person who will collate the information. Use the Neighborhood Conversations directions found on the following pages.

My pre-work before event: Decide where you will seek your Neighborhood Conversations.

Data coordinator name and email: _____

Part Three: Debrief Meeting

Date: ____/____/____ (2 hours)

Clergy, Consultant, Vestry, Mission Search team, and Congregation

Usually held on a weekday evening potluck supper or following church with a light lunch. The whole parish is invited to share photos, insights, and conversations. The session will end with a summary of the important things you have learned that need to be carried forward in your discernment.

My pre-work before event: Send your photos and/or notes to the coordinator.

Data coordinator name and email: _____

Event Notes:

Important information, insights and inspiration. Connections, patterns, alignment with previous discernment and events.

What needs to be carried forward?

What Signs of the Holy Spirit are you noticing?

Follow-up

Neighborhood Prayer Walk Directions

Seek the Lord while God may be found; call upon the Holy One who is near.

Isaiah 55:6

Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Matthew 7:7-8

What Is a Neighborhood Prayer Walk?

It's not just walking around. It's not just praying. It's walking through your neighborhood or "parish", praying with your eyes and your heart wide open. Notice signs of hope and need, and how God calls you to both. Reimagine how your ministry could join God and your neighbors.

Guidelines for Prayer-Walking

- Whether you're near your church or in another neighborhood, plan your route ahead of time. Walk at different days and times, not just Sunday morning. What's happening Tuesdays at 5pm?
- Meet at church and pray with the Prayer Choir before you leave.
- Form pairs of people, ideally covering different areas.
- If your area isn't very walk-friendly, head to common gathering places: shopping centers, groceries, dog parks, town squares, community gardens, the church's five-block radius, and more.
- As you walk, look with care and pray either in silence or aloud softly. Limit chatting or focusing on each other. Focus on the neighborhood.
- Take your camera with you and take photographs of things that strike you.
- Though it's not primary, be open to interaction with people on the way.
- If anyone asks what you are doing, be prepared to respond: "We're from (Church Name), and we are praying and getting to know our neighborhood better." Offer to pray, if it feels appropriate.

Things to look for:

- **People groups:** Who's around and where are they? Who's is standing at bus stops, hanging on street corners, going into stores and businesses, playing in parks? What are seniors doing? What are the age, gender, ethnicity of the people you see? How are they dressed?
- **Places of activity:** What are the places of activity?
- **Structures:** What are the types and conditions of homes, roads, parks, businesses? How much "free space" is there in the community? What is the mix of private and public space? Are there vacant lots that are idle?
- **Services:** Where do people go to shop, eat, study, worship, and receive assistance? Who provides the services and who is receiving?
- **Signs of change:** Note housing under construction, for sale, demolition, and stores/businesses opening or closing. Have closed-up shops been replaced or vacant for a while? Notice languages on shop signs and buildings being used differently from their original purpose.
- **Signs of hope:** Where do you see evidence of God's grace and God's people at work? Examples could be houses of worship, nonprofit organizations, uplifting artwork, playing children, faith symbols, social gatherings, gardens. Look for local assets that could be connected with neighborhood needs.
- **Signs of need:** Where was there evidence of hardship, hurt or injustice. Are there people who appear homeless? Are there day laborers waiting for work? 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.

Neighborhood Prayer Walk Directions (continued)

How Should We Pray?

- *Discernment*: Ask God to show how you can pray with greater insight for the people, events, and places in the community.
- *Blessing*: Pray for the person, home, school, business, situations you see.
- *Empathy*: See and feel what your neighbors live with every day. Pray for brokenness and for blessings and gifts in the community.
- *Scripture*: Prayer based directly on scriptures like Jeremiah 29:5-7; Luke 10:1-2; Mark 12:30-31; or Revelation 21:3-5a.
- *Silence*: Allow silence for God’s spirit to speak to you, or through you.

Concluding the Neighborhood Prayer Walk— perhaps over a meal — gather to share your prayers and observations:

- What did you learn about the neighborhood?
- Where was God’s presence especially apparent?
- What surprised you?
- What was hard? What was engaging?

Bring any notes with you to the debrief meeting. Be ready to share briefly why the photo is important! Send any photographs to your photo point person.

Name and email of photo point person: _____

Notes

Neighborhood Conversations Directions

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Hebrews 13:2

The sensory questions that begin the Neighborhood Conversations packet found on the following pages are designed to help you elevate a sense of new eyes and ears to experience your neighborhood as a new person and to open your mind and heart. Pray before you start your exploration.

Going out two by two, you can start a conversation with a stranger by asking if someone is local to the neighborhood. If they are, introduce yourself by first name and tell them you are gathering information on what life is like in the neighborhood. Let them know you are in the neighborhood, too, and are part of your church. Tell them that you want to ask three questions. Are they ok with a brief discussion? If yes, proceed, if no, thank them and seek out the next person. (If someone says no, do not be discouraged! We don't know their story and today may just not be the day for them.)

In three separate conversations, ask these three questions:

- What are the assets of living in our neighborhood/town?
- What are the challenges of living in our neighborhood/town?
- If there is a spiritual place for you in our neighborhood/town, where is it?

Bring any notes with you to the debrief meeting. Send your notes to the point person who will aggregate the answers.

Name and email of point person: _____

NEIGHBORHOOD CONVERSATIONS WORKSHEET

Part One: Sensory Observations

On your own or in pairs go on a walk around your home, school, church or place of work for 30-60 minutes. Help yourself to see, hear and feel like a new person in your neighborhood and fill out the following sensory observations.

Something smells good:

Something stinks:

A facility used well:

A place people should be, but are not:

Somewhere safe:

Somewhere unsafe:

Something beautiful:

Something ugly:

Somewhere people are gathering and happy:

A place people are gathering and creating mischief:

Something unique:

Something you'd miss if you didn't have:

Part Two: Conversations with Neighbors

Have at least 3 conversations, maybe even with just someone you pass as you are out on your walk. Ask them what they consider the biggest assets, problems, and a spiritual place for them (if one exists) in the neighborhood or city. Use the boxes to capture your notes.

BIGGEST ASSETS:

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BIGGEST PROBLEMS:

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A LOCAL SPIRITUAL PLACE:

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Part Three: Debrief: What are your Impressions?

When you gather to debrief, here are some questions to ponder.

What surprised you the most?

What is the greatest asset that you discovered?

Where do you see the greatest opportunity?

What did you discover that makes you want to act?

Having done the walk about:

What do you **WISH** for?

What **WORRIES** you?

Did anything make you **WONDER**?

Do you see anything that could be **WOVEN** together?

As you work together on your debrief, take time to listen and discern. If you have difficulty in listening to a new inspiration or direction, slow down and use the Discernment Listening Guidelines in Appendix A.

Notes

Event Notes:

Important information, insights and inspiration. Connections, patterns, alignment with previous discernment and events.

What needs to be carried forward?

What Signs of the Holy Spirit are you noticing?

Follow-up

EVENT THREE: Community Panel

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Jeremiah 29:7

Goals:

- To discover what other leaders in your community are doing and who they are serving
- To listen for what they see as challenges, where they see life, and what they are building on
- To listen for alignment of purpose, potential partnerships, inspiration, information, mutual support, and connections to previous points of the congregation's discernment and mission

Date: ____/____/____ (1.5 - 2 hours)

Vestry, Mission Search team, Clergy, Consultant, Parishioners, and Community Leaders

Community leaders are invited to share their work and answer four questions:

- Your name, your organization and who is your constituency?
- What are your challenges?
- Where do you see life and what are you building on?
- What might be a special request of our parish that you and/or your constituents have that would help you better serve the members of the community?

The event is done either in-person or on Zoom, lasts about an hour and is followed by a half hour debrief. Carry forward the most important insights and learnings.

My pre-work before event: Make suggestions to the Mission Search Team of community leaders that might be invited.

Notes:

Event Notes:

Important information, insights and inspiration. Connections, patterns, alignment with previous discernment and events.

What needs to be carried forward?

What Signs of the Holy Spirit are you noticing?

Follow-up

EVENT FOUR: Discovery Café

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Romans 8: 28

Part One: Question Development & Planning for Discovery Café

Goals:

- To create a stimulating question that will engage the whole community (parishioners, neighbors, stakeholders, and community leaders) in reciprocal wellness and flourishing
- To develop invitation list and review needs for event

Date: ____/____/____ (1 hour) Can be done in-person or on Zoom

Clergy, Vestry, Mission Search team, Consultant

The Discovery Café question development process uses the information, inspiration, and understanding generated in the previous events. The questions are constructed to ask how ministry in the congregation can connect to the surrounding community in mutual blessing and support.

As you work together on your question take time to listen and discern. If you come to an impasse or difficulty, slow down and use the Discernment Listening Guidelines in Appendix A.

Part Two: The Discovery Café Event

Goal:

- To invite neighbors and community members and leaders to join the congregation in exploring questions that strengthen relationships, reveal resources, and inspire and encourage the congregation and community in mutual blessing

Date: ____/____/____ (2 hours)

Vestry, Mission Search team, Clergy, Consultant, Parishioners, Community Panel members and others from their organizations, church ministry volunteers, clients, neighbors, people present in the community but not present at church are invited to come together for a two-hour community conversation.

The congregation and community members are invited to join in exploring the questions created by the leadership team. The conversations depend on dialogue and engagement. Help us to explore questions that attract energy and focus our attention on what really matters in our neighborhood. Together we can discover potential ways forward in service and growth in our community.

The Café culminates in each table's sharing of their insights and discoveries. Important discoveries harvested in the Café will be documented and posted for consideration and inspiration in the next steps of discernment. See Additional Resources and Appendix B for more details.

Event Notes:

Important information, insights and inspiration. Connections, patterns, alignment with previous discernment and events.

What needs to be carried forward?

What Signs of the Holy Spirit are you noticing?

Connections, Contacts & Follow-up

EVENT FIVE: The Parish Planning Summit

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 3: 18-21

Goals:

- To reach consensus on long-range commitments after combining the insights, inspiration, connections, learnings, and discernment of the Holy Spirit that have emerged during the Open Doors New Futures process
- To create a basic five-year plan with yearly targets to achieve the goals specified by each of the commitment working groups

Date: ____/____/____ (A 3 hour long-range planning process)

Vestry, Mission Search Team, Clergy, Parishioners, and Consultant

My pre-work before event: Review your notes and the notes shared by your Scribe. Pray. Prepare a ready heart! Review the signs of the Holy Spirit that have been identified.

Explore the [Evangelism page of The Episcopal Church](#) website, the Experiment Page at [TryTank](#), the Open Doors New Futures [list of practices of vital congregations](#), and the resources available at the [Invite Welcome Connect](#) website. (Accessible by clicking the underlined links or scanning the QR codes below). Listen for inspiration as you read through the different strategies and ideas.

Using the accumulated learning, insight, discernment, deep listening, and inspiration in the Open Doors New Futures events, the congregation creates a vision of what their congregation's mission is called to embody in five years. Using "reverse engineering", the congregation creates a working draft plan of the goals and objectives in a five-year long-range plan.

Over the course of the next months the leadership refines the plan and this becomes the template for mission, growth and deepening in discipleship for the coming five years, refining as the Spirit leads.

As you work together in your planning groups, take time to listen and discern. If you come to an impasse or difficulty, slow down and use the Discernment Listening Guidelines in Appendix A.

[TEC Evangelism](#)



[TryTank](#)



[Open Doors New Futures](#)



FIVE-YEAR PLAN

Commitment:

“Catchy” Name: _____

Date: ____/____/____

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| <i>Possible relationships/partners:</i> | <i>Possible funding opportunities:</i> | <i>Notes:</i> |
| | | |

YEAR ONE

| | Goal <i>Where do we want to be in a year? Achievable milestone?</i> | Key Actions <i>What do we need to do to achieve this goal? What steps do we need to take?</i> | Timeline <i>When can we expect to complete this?</i> | Resources <i>Human, financial, physical, others?</i> | Responsible Ministry Team |
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FIVE-YEAR PLAN (CONTINUED)

YEAR TWO

| Goal <i>Where do we want to be in year 2? Achievable milestone?</i> | Key Actions <i>What do we need to do to achieve this goal? What steps do we need to take?</i> | Timeline <i>When can we expect to complete this?</i> | Resources <i>Human, financial, physical, others?</i> | Team Responsible |
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YEAR THREE

| Goal <i>Where do we want to be in year 3? Achievable milestone?</i> | Key Actions <i>What do we need to do to achieve this goal? What steps do we need to take?</i> | Timeline <i>When can we expect to complete this?</i> | Resources <i>Human, financial, physical, others?</i> | Team Responsible |
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FIVE-YEAR PLAN (CONTINUED)

YEAR FOUR

| Goal <i>Where do we want to be in year 4? Achievable milestone?</i> | Key Actions <i>What do we need to do to achieve this goal? What steps do we need to take?</i> | Timeline <i>When can we expect to complete this?</i> | Resources <i>Human, financial, physical, others?</i> | Team Responsible |
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YEAR FIVE

| Goal <i>Where do we want to be in year 5? Achievable milestone?</i> | Key Actions <i>What do we need to do to achieve this goal? What steps do we need to take?</i> | Timeline <i>When can we expect to complete this?</i> | Resources <i>Human, financial, physical, others?</i> | Team Responsible |
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The Parish Planning Summit (continued)

Planning Event Notes:

YEAR ONE:

YEAR TWO:

YEAR THREE:

YEAR FOUR:

YEAR FIVE:

Over the coming months the vestry, and other church leadership will refine the long-range plan, presenting it to the congregation when completed and sharing with the Transition Ministry Team, the Bishop, Episcopal Ministries of Long Island (EMLI) and Episcopal Real Estate of Long Island (ERELI) to help in future support or funding. Use your long-range plan each year to guide your planning and goal setting. Celebrate all God does in and through you as you progress through your plan and at your annual meetings!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. *The Art of Powerful Questions: Catalyzing Insight, Innovation, and Action* by Eric E. Vogt, Juanita Brown, and David Isaacs: dioceseli.org/powerfulquestions
2. Discovery Café Guidelines: dioceseli.org/discoverycafe
3. A Recipe for Collect Writing from *Earth & Altar*: dioceseli.org/collectwriting
4. *Grounded in God: Listening Hearts Discernment for Group Deliberations* by Suzanne G. Farnham, Stephanie A. Hull, R. Taylor McLean: dioceseli.org/groundedingod
5. *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going: Leading in a Liminal Season* by Susan Beaumont: dioceseli.org/leading
6. Spiritual Gifts Quiz: spiritualgiftquiz.org
7. Webinar on Leading Faithful Innovation: dioceseli.org/faithfulinnovation
8. Cafe to Go: dioceseli.org/cafe-go
9. Cycle of Unmanaged Conflict: dioceseli.org/cycle-unmanaged-conflict
10. Viability and Vitality: dioceseli.org/what-we-do/resources/viable-and-vital-ministry-practice
11. Family Systems Theory: The Congregation as a System: dioceseli.org/family-systems
12. Bowen Family Systems Therapy: dioceseli.org/bowen
13. **Antagonists in the Church**
14. Invite Welcome Connect: invitewelcomeconnect.com/checklists-tool-kits

[Access these resources on our website](#)



DISCERNMENT LISTENING GUIDELINES

You are encouraged to use these guidelines for parish mission, community ministry, and personal life decisions.

1

Take time to become settled in God's presence.

2

Listen to others with your entire self (senses, feelings, intuition, imagination, and rational faculties).

3

Do not interrupt.

4

Pause between speakers to absorb what has been said.

5

Do not formulate what you want to say while someone else is speaking.

6

Speak for yourself only, expressing your own thoughts and feelings, referring to your own experiences. Avoid being hypothetical. Steer away from broad generalizations.

7

Do not challenge what others say.

8

Listen to the group as a whole — to those who have not spoken aloud as well as to those who have.

9

Generally, leave space for anyone who may want to speak a first time before speaking a second time yourself.

10

Hold your desires and opinions — even your convictions — lightly.

DISCOVERY CAFÉ GUIDELINES



illustration by Avril Orloff

A series of horizontal dotted lines spanning the width of the page, intended for writing or drawing.

OPEN DOORS NEW FUTURES: What does God want to do here?



OPEN DOORS NEW FUTURES Mission Search, has been developed from the strong work of the Mission Action Plan done by the Anglican Diocese of Toronto, extending thanks especially to Canon Janet Marshall, Director of Congregational Development, the work of Open Doors New Futures done by the Diocese of New York, and the work of Susan Beaumont in *How to When You Don't Know Where You're Going: Leading in a Liminal Time*. We have modified the process and added new tools. The Consultant team of the Diocese of Long Island has shaped this process over a three-year period, and we are deeply indebted to them.

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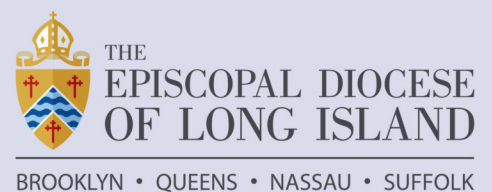
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