

A Spiritual Strategic Journey

Dialogue and Prayer Triplet Guide

100 Days of Discernment

Building relationships with one another
Discerning God's vision
Discovering new adventures
Preparing to develop our future story

This is a sample of one possible manual for the 100 Days of Discernment process.
Multiple congregations have contributed to this sample. **Revised for Ashland, OR, UCC 1/4/2016**

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*[For additional information consult the book by George Bullard entitled **Pursuing the Full Kingdom Potential of Your Congregation.**]*

100 DAYS DIALOGUE AND PRAYER COMMITMENT

MY TRIPLET (Name, Telephone Number, and E-mail Address)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

OUR COMMITMENT TO EACH OTHER

Our Dialogue and Prayer Triplet goals are:

- To gather 10 times for up to 100 minutes over the course of 100 days.
- To faithfully attend each triplet gathering.
- To study and dialogue about the selected scripture.
- To study and dialogue about the congregational issues.
- To image what the positive potential future of our congregation would be if we effectively live into God's vision for us.
- To brainstorm about changes we may need to make in the life and ministry of our congregation to innovatively live into God's future
- To pray daily for one another, the other triplets, our congregation, our pastor/staff, and our lay leaders. To pray for clarity regarding God's call to us as individuals and to our congregation as we discern the next steps for our spiritual strategic journey

- Other: _____

Ground Rules [such as confidentiality]: _____

I will try, with the Spirit's help, to be a regular, faithful, involved, caring member of this Dialogue and Prayer Triplet.

Signed _____ Date _____

Signed _____ Date _____

Signed _____ Date _____

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Courage to Change, Inside and Out

The perennial question is asked the moment our feet hit the doorstep. Children ask it when leaving the house in tow, and church members ask it when embarking on a new initiative. The answer for our congregation is that **we are going where God sends us**. That's not satisfactory, of course. We want clearer answers. It's like a parent telling a child, "We're going where I take you, and that's all you need to know." But it isn't all we need to know, not really. We want to know the destination. Where is God sending us?

The early Christians struggled with the same question. They asked Jesus where they were going and he answered them, "I am the way." But the answer wasn't enough. They didn't just want to know *how to get there*; they wanted to know *where they were going*. We too question Jesus, asking for guidance, direction, and a plan of action. This questioning is prayer. And the initial answer will be the same. Jesus is our way. If we love the way Jesus loved, live the way he lived, serve the way he served, we will remain on the way God is sending us, we will embody what Beth Estock calls "Shalom on the Move."

But the nagging question remains: on the way where? Simply saying "Beloved Community" isn't enough. The Beloved Community can seem far distant from the world we live in, and we want answers for the here and now.

Two statements by Jesus may give us a sense of direction. The first, "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21, *NIV*). Sometimes we think of Shalom – sometimes called the Reign of God -- as something located in the future. Jesus suggests that the promises of God are present with us *now*.

The second statement: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21, *NLT*). Because we have been given God's promises, we are sent to dialogue them. We must recover an understanding of the church not so much as a group that is to be gathered, but as a people who have been scattered. We are the ones who have been sent.

God is sending us on a *spiritual* strategic journey to proclaim the good news of Shalom. This means our strategy must be more than programs and three-year goals. Our church's mission must arise directly from our church's spiritual life.

Prayer enables us to discern our mission. When rooted in contemplation, the fruits of Christian action grow healthy and strong. Immersed in prayer, we are able to live, love and serve with Jesus wherever God sends us.

Whenever God asks great things of people, God calls them first to pray. People pray in all different ways! But all prayer connects us with the abundant life we see in Jesus. Prayer connects us with each other. When we gather in a small prayer group and pray for one another, we realize true community by listening together for God's voice.

Through prayer we are able to dialogue our stories of faith and life, frustration and sadness, hope and possibility. By sharing our experiences of life and prayer, our Jesus-shaped vision will be clearer, as will our understanding of where God is sending us and what God expects of us here.

Your Dialogue and Prayer Triplet is a covenant group. In it you are committing:

- to pray for each other and the church on a regular basis;
- to meet together at your agreed upon times;
- to continue with your group throughout the entire 100 days;
- to be a safe prayer companion and to keep your private sharing confidential;
- to have an open mind as you listen for God's voice and watch for God's leading.

Are we there yet? No. Not completely. But in Jesus the "Realm of God" is already here. Will we know everything we need to know about our calling at the end of these 100 days? No. But by the end of our time together, we will have a clearer sense of God's vision for our congregation. The elements of our future story will begin to emerge, and they will shape who we become and where we will go. May it be so. Amen.

DIALOGUE AND PRAYER GATHERING

GENERAL FORMAT

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

Begin by sharing what has happened in the last week and how God has been active in it.

Perhaps light a candle to remind everyone of Christ's continued presence when two or three (in this case three) are gathered. You might begin by singing a chorus or hymn together, or if you don't want to sing, be in silence, then read the text of a song or poem about prayer. Appoint a different person each week to offer a gathering prayer of their own, or lead you together in the Prayer of Jesus ("Lord's Prayer") or one of the suggested prayers in this booklet.

SCRIPTURE

20 minutes

This guide will offer scripture passages for your group to consider. Sample questions for dialogue follow.

DIALOGUE

30-40 minutes

Spend time developing your spiritual relationship with each other. Go beyond the superficial and dialogue your dreams and concerns. Each week this guide will suggest topics for discussion drawn from the "Congregational Issues for a Generative Dialogue for a Spiritual Strategic Journey" inventory. These conversation starters should help generate healthy dialogue and stimulate creative thinking. *Record some of your insights.*

PRAYER

20-30 minutes

Consider keeping a list of prayer concerns. Include personal requests as well as wishes for our congregation. Include thanksgiving for blessings and celebrations of answered prayer. Pray out loud. Take turns then take turns again. Allow the Spirit to pray in you. Share different ways of praying. Rest in the silences. Take your time.

If praying aloud is new to you, consider using the **A-C-T-S** format:

- Begin with **ADORATION** praising God for who God is
- Move to **CONFESSION**, acknowledging failures or points of brokenness
- Offer **THANKS** for what God has done in your life, in the life of the church, and in the world
- Conclude with **SUPPLICATIONS** asking God for the things you need

BENEDICTION

1-2 minutes

Benediction is a time for blessing each other with the grace of God and praying for God's continued presence in each day to come. You might choose a different person to offer the Benediction each time you meet.

TOTAL TIME 80–100 minutes

TELLING OUR STORIES

Orientation or Initial Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

Grant that we may know what we ought to know, to love what we ought to love, to praise what delights you most, to value what is precious in your sight. Amen.

(Thomas á Kempis)

SCRIPTURE

20 minutes

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Holy One, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the God, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says God. (Jeremiah 29:11-14, NRSV)

When your life has seemed pointless and hopeless, how do you feel when you hear that God's plans for you include a "future with hope"? Dialogue what it means to you to search for God with all your heart.

DIALOGUE

30-40 minutes

Sample check-in questions: What was the high point of your week and what was your low? Where did you see God active in your life this week? Tell something about your spiritual journey. What was the place of prayer in your home as a child? How did you first encounter Jesus? How did you come to be part of our congregation? How you are learning to listen for God's voice and discern God's will in your life? Allow each person about 10 minutes.

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 23]

20-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

You may choose to use the suggested sessions in order or to rearrange them as you see fit, or to find other ways of dialogue or prayer together using other prayer resources. The following sessions are provided as a guide to assist you in deepening your relationship with each other and with God, and to discuss issues related to God's vision for our congregation as we claim God's future vision.

Insights from this Gathering:

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

First Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened in your life since we last met, and how is God at work in it?

Be thou my vision, O God 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.
Be thou my wisdom, O thou my true word; I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;
Thou my redeemer, my love thou hast won, thou in me dwelling and I with thee one.
Great God of heaven, my victory won, may I reach heaven's joy, O bright heaven's sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall, still be my vision, O Ruler of all.
(Irish song, tr. Mary E. Byrne, 1905)

SCRIPTURE

20 minutes

Where there is no vision the people perish. (Proverbs 29:18, King James Version)

If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves. (Proverbs 29:18, The Message)

"In the last days it will be," God declares, "that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." (Acts 2:17, NRSV)

How is God "opening your eyes" toward the future? Is there some vision or dream from God that you are being called to help realize? How can you begin this week to live what you see?

DIALOGUE

30-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on "Visionary Leadership" in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. What is your dream or vision for your future? What is your dream or vision for our congregation? What do you think is God's vision for you and for our congregation? When we are the church we are meant to be, what will we look like? Who will we be? What will we do? Consider things we are already doing well. Consider things we can do better.

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 8]

20-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

Insights from this Gathering:

ENRICHING RELATIONSHIPS

Second Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened since we last met, and how is God at work in it?

“Members of the early community of faith were devoted to one another as well as to the teaching. In both large and small-group settings, they met together for praise and worship, prayer and study. They invested themselves in deep, lasting relationships for growth and accountability. And together, they sought “to provoke one another to love and good deeds... encouraging one another” (Hebrews 10:25, NRSV)”

SCRIPTURE

20 minutes

Jesus replied, “You must love the Holy One your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment and the second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40, NLT)

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up only one body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into Christ’s body by one Spirit, and we have all received the same Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13, NLT)

How are love of self, others and God connected? How do you love with your whole heart? Which part of this commandment requires the most effort for you? Which is easiest? How in the coming week can you demonstrate the love of God in your life in order build up the body of Christ?

DIALOGUE

30-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on “Relationship Experiences” in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. Describe an important friendship that has been meaningful to you in your life. What made the relationship special? How did you make up after arguments? Talk more about your relationship with God and Jesus. How is your relationship with God different than your relationships with friends? How does your relationship with God affect your relationship with people at church? In your family? Among your friends?

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 24]

20-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

Insights from this Gathering:

MEETING NEEDS WITH PROGRAMS

Third Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened since we last met, and how is God at work in it?

O Christ of the poor and the yearning, kindle in my heart within a flame of love for my neighbor, for my foe, for my friend, for my kindred all. From the humblest thing that lives, to the Name that is highest of all, kindle in my heart within a flame of Love. (*Celtic Prayers from Iona*, by J. Philip Newell)

SCRIPTURE

20 minutes

But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. Those who spoke Greek complained against those who spoke Hebrew, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers... "Now look around among yourselves, brothers, and select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. We will put them in charge of this business." (Acts 6:1-2a, 3, NLT)

Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service in the church, but it is the same God we are serving. There are different ways God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work through all of us. (1 Corinthians 12:4-6, NLT)

And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25, NRSV)

What general attitudes do you see in the early church as programs are initiated and carried out? Do we have similar attitudes today? How do our programs emerge to meet present needs? When a need is met, how does the program respond?

DIALOGUE

30-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on "Programmatic Emphases" in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. What activities or programs of the church that are very important to you, and why? What is one program you could do without? "Something the church did that made a difference in my life was ...". Talk more about your involvement in the ministries of this congregation. What programs do we do well? Which ones could be better?

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 30]

20-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

Insights from this Gathering:

MANAGING AND DECIDING

Fourth Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened since we last met, and how is God at work in it?

O most merciful Redeemer, friend, and brother, may we know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly, for thine own sake. Amen.
(Richard of Chichester, 13th century – and you thought it was just *Godspell!*)

SCRIPTURE

20 minutes

I have a special concern for you church leaders. I know what it's like to be a leader, in on Christ's sufferings as well as the coming glory. Here's my concern: that you care for God's flock with all the diligence of a shepherd. Not because you have to, but because you want to please God. Not calculating what you can get out of it, but acting spontaneously. Not bossily telling others what to do, but tenderly showing them the way. When God, who is the best shepherd of all, comes out in the open with Shalom, God will see that you've done it well and commend you. And you who are younger must follow your leaders. But all of you, leaders and followers alike, are to be down to earth with each other, for — God has had it with the proud, but takes delight in just plain people. (1 Peter 5:1-5, The Message)

Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise. Use these words to teach and counsel each other. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Teacher Jesus, all the while giving thanks through Jesus to the Creator of us All. (Colossians 3:16-17, NLT)

What is the role of the leader or officer in the church? Why is the conduct of church leaders so important in challenging times? How do you respond to authority in the church, either as one who exercises it or one who accepts it? How do biblical models of leadership challenge today's church?

DIALOGUE

30-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on "Accountable Management" in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. What do you think is the ideal church structure? Is there one biblical model or several? How do we keep a good balance between Spirit-led flexibility and practical organization? "Something I really like about the way our church does things is..." "If I were in charge, the first thing I would change is..." What are we doing well? What can we do better?

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 95:1-7]

20-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

Insights from this Gathering:

STAYING CONTEXTUALLY RELEVANT

Fifth Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened since we last met, and how is God at work in it?

God of change and glory, God of time and space, when we fear the future, give to us your grace... As the old ways disappear, let your love cast out all fear. (Al Carmines, 1973)

In the midst of new dimensions, in the face of changing ways,
Who will lead the pilgrim peoples wandering in their separate ways?
God of rainbow, fiery pillar, leading where the eagles soar,
We your people, ours the journey, now and evermore. (Julian Rush, 1985)

SCRIPTURE

20 minutes

An immigrant's daughter is delivered

Jesus left that place and went into the region of Tyre. He didn't want anyone to know that he had entered a house, but he couldn't hide. In fact, a woman whose young daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit heard about him right away. She came and fell at his feet. The woman was Greek, Syrophenician by birth. She begged Jesus to throw the demon out of her daughter. He responded, "The children have to be fed first. It isn't right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

But she answered, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

"Good answer!" he said. "Go on home. The demon has already left your daughter." When she returned to her house, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

(Mark 7:24-30, CEB)

Can Christians really aspire to be all things to all people? How can we be church in such a way that we are relevant to those in our community, in a post-Christendom, multi-religious, economically divided, institutionally suspicious, connection-hungry, increasingly diverse, global community?

DIALOGUE

30-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on "Contextual Relevance" in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. Who are the kinds of people you most like being with? What kinds of people make you uncomfortable? Who should we be recruiting, ministering to, seeking out to be "shalom on the move" with us? Are there people we should not be recruiting or seeking out? How relevant are we to our context and the demographic realities of our time and community? How can we do better?

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 100]

20-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

Insights from this Gathering:

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

Sixth Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened since we last met, and how is God at work in it?

I cannot dance, Holy One, unless you lead me.
If you want me to leap with abandon,
You must intone the song.
Then I shall leap into love,
From love into knowledge,
From knowledge into enjoyment,
And from enjoyment beyond all human sensations.
There I want to remain, yet want also to circle higher still.

- Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The flowing light of the Godhead*, New York: Paulist Press, 1998.

SCRIPTURE

20 minutes

So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing. Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in God's work. They work hard among you and warn you against all that is wrong. Think highly of them and give them your wholehearted love because of their work. And remember to live peaceably with each other. (1 Thessalonians 5:11-13, NLT)

And now God is building you, as living stones, into a spiritual temple. What's more, you are God's holy priests, who offer spiritual offerings that please the Holy One. (1 Peter 2:4-5, NLT)

How well does Paul's description of "those who are your leaders in God's work" fit your understanding of pastoral ministry? How often do you pray for your pastor? Do you esteem pastors (current and previous) highly in love? Do you think of yourself as part of a holy priesthood? What is *your* pastoral ministry?

DIALOGUE

30-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on "Pastoral Leadership" in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. Describe something a pastor did that helped you. Describe a time when a pastor disappointed you. If you could be pastor of the church for one week, how would you spend your time? (What do you think is a pastor's job?) What "spiritual gifts" does your pastor offer that can lead to spiritual transformation of the congregation?

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 108:1-6]

20-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

Insights from this Gathering:

PEOPLE OF PASSION

Seventh Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened since we last met, and how has God been at work in it?

Wouldst thou know my meaning?

Lie down in the Fire

See and taste the Flowing / Godhead through thy being;

Feel the Holy Spirit / Moving and compelling

Thee within the Flowing / Fire and Light of God

(Mechthild of Magdeburg, 13th Century German mystic)

SCRIPTURE

20 minutes

He found in the temple those who were selling cattle, sheep, and doves, as well as those involved in exchanging currency sitting there. He made a whip from ropes and chased them all out of the temple, including the cattle and the sheep. He scattered the coins and overturned the tables of those who exchanged currency. He said to the dove sellers, "Get these things out of here! Don't make my Father's house a place of business." His disciples remembered that it is written, "Passion for your house consumes me." (John 2:14-17)

"We are created with a drive to self-transcend, to move beyond oneself for the joy and blessing of others. It is all positive, an original blessing instead of an original sin, sending us toward a cosmic hope. There is something within us, which Christians call the Holy Spirit, that makes us aware that we are here to co-create with God and make something beautiful of the world."

~Richard Rohr

Passion runs hot and cold. What was the early church passionate about? What causes you to become passionate about something? Do you want to change your "spiritual thermostat?" What about the church's "spiritual thermostat"? The story of Jesus' suffering and death is often called the "passion narrative" because suffering and passion are related. How is your passion also a source of suffering? How do you feel about that?

DIALOGUE

30-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on "People of Passion" in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. Name some ministries you feel strongly about and why. What are some things you think Jesus felt strongly about? Do you think you and Jesus are passionate about the same sorts of things? What is your sense of urgency for change and transition at our congregation?

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 111]

20-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

Insights from this Gathering:

PEOPLE OF POSITION

Eighth Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened since we last met, and how is God active in it?

“Almighty God, in every age you have called out men and women to be your faithful servants. We believe you have now called us to join that great company who seek to follow you. Grant unto us today and always a clear vision of your call and strength to fulfill the ministry assigned to us. We pray in the name of Christ. Amen.” (*A Guide to Prayer*, p. 65)

SCRIPTURE

20 minutes

After these things, Jesus commissioned seventy-two others and sent them on ahead in pairs to every city and place he was about to go. He said to them, “The harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Creator of the harvest to send out workers for this harvest. Go! Be warned, though, that I’m sending you out as lambs among wolves. Carry no wallet, no bag, and no sandals. Don’t even greet anyone along the way. Whenever you enter a house, first say, ‘May peace be on this house.’ If anyone there shares God’s peace, then your peace will rest on that person. If not, your blessing will return to you. Remain in this house, eating and drinking whatever they set before you, for workers deserve their pay. Don’t move from house to house. Whenever you enter a city and its people welcome you, eat what they set before you. Heal the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘God’s Realm has come to you.’ Whenever you enter a city and the people don’t welcome you, go out into the streets and say, ‘As a complaint against you, we brush off the dust of your city that has collected on our feet. But know this: God’s Realm has come to you.’ (Luke 10:1-11, Common English Bible)

Does Jesus expect too much of the apostles? Of us? Has God asked you to go anywhere or do anything? How did you respond? Is God asking our leaders to go anywhere or do anything right now? Is the Spirit asking you? Where will you go for God before we meet again?

DIALOGUE

30-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on “People of Position” in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. Which would you rather be a leader or a follower? In our church, do we have the right number of leaders and followers? Is our leadership circle open or closed? What can you do to empower our leaders to achieve the change and transformation God is calling forth from the congregation? What actions or attitudes might derail our leadership from this calling?

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 117]

20-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

Insights from this Gathering:

CONGREGATIONAL GROWTH

Ninth Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened since we last met, and how is God active in it?

Sit quietly, with eyes closed. Breathe. Who was it who first showed you or shared with you, and experience of God or Holy Love? Can you picture them in your heart's eye?

Who first communicated to you – in word or deed, in a way you could truly trust the message – that you are Beloved? Offer gratitude to that person.

Now ask your heart once more: Has anyone ever thanked you for being that person for them?

Thank the Divine Presence in you that enabled that good news to be heard by another.

SCRIPTURE

20 minutes

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

When he finished speaking to the crowds, he said to Simon, "Row out farther, into the deep water, and drop your nets for a catch." Simon replied, "Master, we've worked hard all night and caught nothing. But because you say so, I'll drop the nets."

So they dropped the nets and their catch was so huge that their nets were splitting. They signaled for their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They filled both boats so full that they were about to sink. When Simon Peter saw the catch, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Leave me, Sir, for I'm a sinner!" Peter and those with him were overcome with amazement because of the number of fish they caught. James and John, Zebedee's sons, were Simon's partners and they were amazed too.

Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid. From now on, you will be fishing for people." As soon as they brought the boats to the shore, they left everything and followed Jesus. (Luke 5:4-11)

DIALOGUE

30-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on "Congregational Growth" in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. If church is "Shalom on the Move," how do we connect to the people to whom God may be sending us? How easy is it for a new person to connect with our church? Do you think they feel welcome? Do your friends know you are Christian and that you attend this church? Do you have many friends who would not identify as Christian? How do you talk about your faith with them?

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 121]

20-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

Insights from this Gathering:

LIVING IN HARMONY

Tenth Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened since we last met, and how is God active in it?

Hope of the world, O Christ of great compassion:
Speak to our fearful hearts by conflict rent;
Save us, your people, from consuming passion,
Who by our own false hopes and aims are spent. (Georgia Harkness, 1954)

SCRIPTURE

20 minutes

Stop being bitter and angry and mad at others. Don't yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude. Instead, be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ. Do as God does. After all, you are God's dear children. Let love be your guide. Christ loved us and offered life for us as a sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 4:31-5:2, CEV)

"If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him—work it out between the two of you. If they listen, you've made a friend. If they won't listen, take one or two others along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again. If they still won't listen, tell the church. If they won't listen to the church, you'll have to start over from scratch, and offer again God's forgiving love. Take this most seriously: A yes on earth is yes in heaven; a no on earth is no in heaven. What you say to one another is eternal. I mean this. When two of you get together on anything at all on earth and make a prayer of it, the Spirit goes into action. And when two or three of you are together because of me, you can be sure that I'll be there." (Matthew 18:15-20, The Message)

What conflict do you think the early church was struggling with? In what way do you think being "imitators of God" enables us to work through conflict? Has a member of the church ever hurt you and you then followed this model? What happened?

DIALOGUE

30-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on "Level of Conflict" in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. Is it okay for Christians to disagree? Describe a time when someone disagreed with you in a way that did not tear you down. Were you ever part of a "church fight" where Christ was honored? How? Do you think God keeps a forgiveness score? Is there someone God is calling you to forgive? How will you answer God's call?

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 134]

20-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

Insights from this Gathering:

10 CONGREGATIONAL ISSUES FOR GENERATIVE DIALOGUE

1: Visionary Leadership

"Our congregation has a strong, clear, and passionate sense of our identity involving mission and purpose (who we are), our core values (what we believe or highly value), our vision (where we are headed), and our spiritual strategic journey as a congregation (how we are getting there)."

2: Relationship Experiences

"Our congregation is doing well at inviting people to a progressive faith journey (evangelism) and a relationship with a congregational community (connection). We are also doing well at helping people who are connected to be on an intentional and maturing faith journey (discipleship). This is bearing fruit in a deepening spirituality (spiritual growth), the development of numerous new leaders (leadership development), and a willingness by many people to engage in ministry service both within and beyond the congregation (mobilization)."

3: Programmatic Emphases

"Our congregation has outstanding programs, ministries, and activities for which we are well known throughout our geographic community or the target groups we serve. Our programs, ministries, and activities seem to be growing in numbers and quality. Our programs are meeting real, identified spiritual, social, and emotional needs of people."

4: Accountable Management

"Our congregation has excellent, flexible management systems (teams, committees, councils, boards, leadership communities) that empower the future direction of our congregation. Decision-making is vision-directed, effective and transparent. Finances are healthy and increasing each year. The management systems are supportive of the visionary leadership efforts by the pastor, staff, and congregational leadership."

5: Contextual Relevance

"Our congregation is demographically similar to its geographic community or the target groups we serve. Little or no gap is developing between the persons attending our congregation, and the geographic community or the target groups we have sought to serve over the past ten years. Our make-up and ministry is reflective of population trends in gender, age, race/ethnicity, socioeconomics, and lifestyle."

6: Pastoral Leadership

"Our pastor has a genuine commitment to change and transition for our congregation that may lead to transformation and the achievement of the full potential of our congregation. In addition, our pastor is highly respected by our congregation, and they will proactively support our pastor's initiating leadership and vision casting as part of a spiritual, strategic journey toward reaching our full potential."

7: People of Passion

"I can name at least seven people or seven percent—whichever is higher—of the average number of active, participating adults in our congregation, engaged in a typical week, who have a positive and passionate sense of urgency for change and transition that may lead to transformation and the achievement of the full potential of our congregation. They also have the spiritual, leadership, and strategic knowledge and maturity to appropriately initiate and champion change and transition within our congregation."

8: People of Position

"Our key lay leaders have a genuine commitment to change and transition for our congregation that may lead to transformation and the achievement of the full potential of our congregation. While not always the people of greatest passion about the future of the congregation, by position and power they are competent and committed to lead us to fulfill our potential. In addition, our congregation highly respects them, and will proactively support their leadership in a spiritual, strategic journey toward God's vision for us."

9: Congregational Growth

"Our congregation has grown in membership and weekly worship attendance during the past five to ten years by a minimum of 10 to 15 percent. (Or, compared to the change over the past five to ten years in population or size of the geographic community or the target groups we serve, our congregation has sustained or achieved an attendance that could be legitimately called growing compared to our geographic community or target groups.)"

10: Communication and Conflict

"Our congregation has clear, open, healthy communication channels that allow the congregation to identify and deal with any issues that might disrupt the sense of fellowship and unity, and perhaps produce unhealthy conflict. Our congregation works hard at creating and nurturing healthy relationships as a Jesus-shaped faith community, and uses our diversity to build a deep, qualitative sense of being on a common journey. We know how to disagree with one another without being disagreeable in a way that can destroy our relationship with God and one another."

TRIPLET PRAYER LIST

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What are Three Positive Actions You Plan to Take to Contribute to the Future Vitality of Our Congregation as a Result of Your Participation in the this Dialogue and Prayer Triplet?

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This page is for your personal reflection and, if you desire, sharing with your Triplet.

What are the Top Five to Seven Insights or Discernments About God's Future for Our Congregation Your Triplet Would Like to Share?

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To be completed by the Triplet and turned in at the end of the 10 sessions.