



**Learning
Communities
Initiative**

Training Handout

September 29th, 2018
Vanderkamp Center

Our Learning Community Journey Together – CNY 2018



What is a Learning Community?

A learning community is a group of congregations who commit to one another in a nine-month learning experience. Through prayer, skill-building, action and reflection they address pressing questions about the future. The experience includes three Saturday workshops and ongoing coaching calls with diocesan leaders and Dwight Zscheile (author of *The Agile Church*) and Michael Binder.

What will we be doing together?

1. Gathering for 3 Training Workshops

Agile Leadership: Begin by Asking Different Questions (Saturday, February 24, 2018) This first training helps equip participants to listen to God in their local contexts. Participants will dwell in Scripture together, share stories about what God is doing in the life of their local church, and notice where God might be at work in their everyday lives. The goal for these practices is to help the participants begin to answer the question, “What might God be up to?”

Learn by Doing: Using Action Learning to Discover God's Leading

(Saturday, June 2, 2018) In our Learning Community training, we will focus on helping participants use action learning to deepen their exploration of what they think God might be up to. The idea is to help participants “behave their way into new thinking,” rather than only trying to think their way into new behaviors. Participants will be given simple “action learning experiments” to try with others in their congregation.

Sharing Our Learning: Intentional Reflection on Our Actions

(Saturday, September 29, 2018) – Our third training will focus on learning to share what we've learned from the action learning experiments we did over the summer. Action learning requires intentional reflection on what was done so we can see what God might be teaching us!

2. Taking Steps in-between Training Sessions

A Guiding Team from each participating congregation will be attending the training sessions listed above and then taking what they learn back to their congregations. They will be empowered to invite others from their congregation to participate in learning together as we move through the process.

Leadership

Who is leading this learning community process?

With the support of Bishop Duncan-Probe, the Diocese has established a Coordinating Team of people who are charged with helping facilitate the process and reflect on what the Diocese is learning as a whole through this work.

Team Members: Ms. Carol Forrester, Dr. Bambi Carkey, Ms. Patricia Kinney, the Rev. Brooks Cato, the Rev. Canon John Crosswaite, Ms. Kathy Dengler

We have invited consultants to help guide and teach us in this process. Drs. Dwight Zscheile and Michael Binder have significant experience in helping guide congregations, clergy, and diocesan leaders through this learning community process. They are here to help the diocese build capacity to facilitate this learning community process on its own.

Coaching

Each Guiding Team will be provided a coach who will help them take the steps outlined by the process.

Training Day Agenda

September 29th, 2018

Sharing Our Learning: Intentional Reflection on Our Actions

9:00 - 9:45	Welcome and Dwelling in Scripture Together (Acts 16:6-15)
9:45 - 10:30	Sharing Our Stories – What We Did and What We Learned (Part 1)
10:30 - 10:45	Break
10:45 - 11:15	Sharing Our Stories – What We Did and What We Learned (Part 2)
11:15 – 12:00	What Might God Be Leading Us to Do Next?
12:00 – 1:00	Lunch
1:00 - 1:30	Introducing Learning Communities Initiatives 2019
1:30 - 2:30	Team Planning Time: Determining Next Steps
2:30 – 2:45	Sharing Next Step Plans
2:45 - 3:00	Where Have You Seen God at Work Today?

Dwelling in the Word

Dwelling in the Word is an ancient way of reading the Scripture. Dwelling in the Word is a way of spiritually submitting to the text as one way God speaks to us, with a willingness to be shaped by what God might want to say through the Scripture. In this way, we are being interpreted by the text together as we listen to it.

Three questions guide our listening:

1. What caught your attention?
2. What question would you want to ask?
3. Where might the Spirit be nudging us?

The process of dwelling in a particular text is as follows:

Listen to the Word Together

- ◎ Pray that God would speak to us
- ◎ Read the text, slowly
- ◎ Allow for silence
- ◎ Read again
- ◎ Allow for silence

Listen to Someone Else

- ◎ Find one person you can share your thoughts about the text with, a “reasonably friendly looking stranger,” someone you maybe don’t know well
- ◎ Spend 4-5 minutes each sharing about what caught your imagination, or a question you have, or what you think the Spirit might be saying

Share in a Group

- ◎ Share in a group of 6-8 people what you heard your conversation partner say

What might God be saying to us as a group? What are you hearing?

Dwelling in the Word

Acts 16:6-15

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.

Questions:

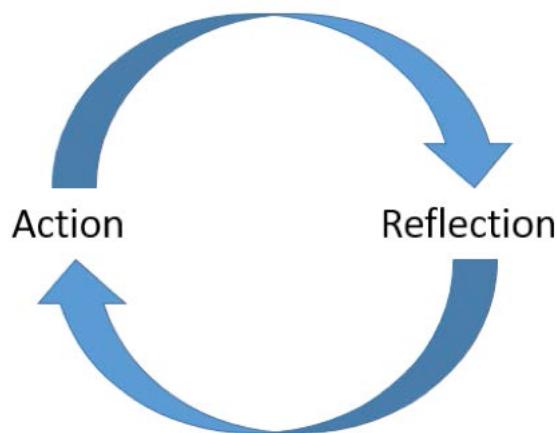
What catches your attention in this passage?

What questions does this passage create for you?

What do you think God might be saying to your parish or the Diocese through this passage?

Reflecting on Our Actions

A key practice that is often left out in processes of congregational change is this simple but powerful step of reflecting on what we have done. Reflection is, perhaps, the most difficult and yet the most important in terms of a congregation starting to self-consciously reflect on what it has done. Without this practice of reflection, getting into the bones and rhythms of a congregation's life, the first three practices will be little more than a moment of trying something before moving on to something else. Once you have completed your experiments, it is important to reflect on what you have learned. It is through your reflections that you will uncover what your next actions might be.



As you continue to engage in more experiments and reflect on what you are learning, you will begin to see transformation unfold in your congregations. This ongoing cycle of action-reflection learning allows us to act our way into new ways of thinking.

Experiment Stories: Failure, Energy, and God's Vision

Learning from Failure

Failure is a normal part of learning and trying new things.

- Has anything you have tried felt like it has failed so far?
- What did it look like?
- What did you learn from that?

Discovering New Energy

Partnering with God in a new way often results in a release of new energy in and outside the congregation.

- Did your experiment seem to generate some new energy with your Guiding Team, the participants in your experiment, or both?
- Why do you think there was new energy?

Uncovering God's Vision

As we behave our way into new thinking we begin to see a picture of the future God might have in mind for our congregation.

- How might God be inviting you into partnership with God's work in the neighborhood?
- What clues could be pointing you in a new direction?

Sharing Stories – What We Did and What We Learned

What did we do?

What happened?

What did we learn?

What did we learn from failing?

Where did we discover new energy?

How is God inviting us into the neighborhood?

What new questions do we have now?

What should we do next?

How can we share what we're learning?

How might God be leading your team to move forward in light of what you learned through this experiment?

What Might God Be Leading Us to Do Next?

Asking God Questions of your Stories

So you've completed some listening work and tried out some action learning experiments. Now what? It can be difficult to determine what the next step should be.

The key to determining the next step is learning to ask "God questions" of the work you have done so far. While it may be helpful to do more listening, more experimenting, and more story sharing, the goal is to determine ways in which you think God might be inviting you to partner with the work God is already doing.

Here are a few examples of "God questions" you can ask of your work so far:

- As you listened to others, in what ways did they say God had impacted their lives (i.e. through relationships, experiences, Scripture, church activities, etc.)
- As you paid attention to your "neighborhood," in what ways did you notice God was present or active?
- As you listened to Scripture together, what themes or insights did God bring about in your conversations?
- When you share your stories about your action learning experiments, where did God bring new energy to your team and your parish?
- Was there any way that God brought surprise through your action learning experiment?
- Did you notice any ways people were hurting or suffering as you engaged in your action learning experiment? How do you think God wants to respond to that hurting or suffering?
- When you listen to the stories of others who engaged in an action learning experiment, do you see any themes that God

may want you to pay attention to? Or is there one particular story that God is using to really grab your heart?

- What might God be leading your parish to try next?

Think about these three practices you've experienced this year as tools in your toolbox: listening, experimenting, sharing stories. How might God want you to use them to engage the people in your parish and your neighborhoods?

Introducing Learning Communities Initiatives 2019

The Learning Communities Initiative will continue in 2019! You are invited!

Here is what that means:

- All Parishes in the Diocese are invited to join the LCI process in 2019
- There will be three training days offered to Guiding Teams in 2019: March 2nd, June 1st, and September 28th
- The content of the trainings will be focused on the same practices: Listening for God's presence and activity, learning by doing (action learning experiments) and sharing stories about our learning.
 - For Parishes that participated in Year 1 of the LCI process, the focus will be on how the Guiding Team can use these practices (listening, experimenting, sharing stories) to address concrete ministry areas in the life of the parish.
 - For Parishes that are just joining the LCI process for the first time, the trainings will help introduce them to these 3 practices the same way that was done in 2018.

If you would like to participate in the next year of the LCI process, please contact:

Carol Forrester carolforrester924@gmail.com
315/771-5663

Planning Next Steps – Your Assignment

Your Assignment: Listen, Experiment, Share (Oct 2018 - Feb 2019)

Determine Next Steps

Your primary assignment this fall is to determine how your parish wants to participate in the Learning Communities Initiative going forward. There are several options available to you:

- Continue to engage in the LCI process for the next year, come to the trainings and keep learning together
 - This may mean your Guiding Team stays the same and you all continue on this journey together
 - This may mean some of your Guiding Team changes, you add new members, and the new team continues together
- Take what you have learned and apply to it to the regular ministry life of your parish. How might the practices of listening for God, trying new experiments, and sharing stories help your parish do its ministry in your own context?

Gather

Meet as a Guiding Team 3-4 times between October and February to discuss your next steps as a parish. These meetings could help you determine who will remain on your guiding team if you plan to continue on in 2019.

Continue to Dwell in the Word

Plan to listen to some part of Scripture together at each of your meetings. Invite other groups in your parish to begin using this practice when they gathered. Keep track of what you are learning as you engage this practice.

Do More Listening, Experimenting, and Sharing

Now that you have experienced all three trainings, consider the following action steps:

- Is there more listening work your team would like to engage in to help your parish become more aware of the ways God is present and at work in your midst?
- Is there another action learning experiment your team would like to invite people to try?
- Are there stories you want to be sure and share with the parish and the neighborhood from your experiences in this process so far?

KEY QUESTION: WHAT MIGHT GOD BE UP TO?

Next Training Date: Saturday, March 2nd, 2019

APPENDIX: ACTION LEARNING HANDOUTS FROM TRAINING #2

ACTION LEARNING EXPERIMENT ASSIGNMENT OPTIONS

We encourage your guiding team to think about possible action learning experiments you want to try in two major categories: investing presence and investing relationship. We hope these categories will help you imagine how you can “learn by doing” in some of the areas of focus surfaced by your listening work. Below you will find a description of what these categories mean and how you might choose to experiment with each of them.

Action Learning Experiment Category #1: Investing Presence

Many of you may have found in your listening work that there are places in your communities that you feel God might be inviting you to invest more of your time and a presence in an effort to better understand what God might be doing there.

Is there a place you came across in your “neighborhood” that you could spend more time in just to see what God might be doing there?

Examples:

- Barbershop/Hair Salon
- Skate park where kids hangout
- Coffeeshop
- Laundromat
- Farm Supply Store
- Grocery store
- Library
- Movie Theater
- Food Pantry
- Craft Brewery
- Neighborhood fair/street fair
- Farmers Markets

Once you identify a place, consider spending an extended period of time there on more than one occasion over the next few months (30-60 minutes each visit for 3 visits).

While you are there, ask yourself some questions:

- How would I describe the people here?
- Why are people gathering here?
- What makes me comfortable or uncomfortable in this space?
- What do I think God is doing in the lives of the people here?
- What might God be up to in this space?

ACTION LEARNING EXPERIMENT ASSIGNMENT OPTIONS

Another category we suggest you consider when thinking about action learning experiments is investing relationship. Through your listening work, you may have come across people that you think God might want you to be better connected to as a parish.

Action Learning Experiment Category #2: Investing Relationship

Are there people that God introduced you to through your listening work over the last few months that God might want you to develop more relationship with?

- Someone you interviewed
- Someone you didn't know in your parish until recently
- Someone you came across while walking the neighborhood and taking pictures
- A leader in your neighborhood/town
- An actual physical neighbor
- A co-worker
- Someone you just happened to meet

If you can identify someone or a group of people you think God might want you to get to know better, consider some ways you might engage with them over the next 3 months. Examples include:

- Inviting a neighbor over for dinner (and maybe even asking them to share some of their spiritual journey with you)
- Getting to know the name and something about a person who works somewhere you regularly go (i.e. coffeeshop, store, library, etc.)
- Helping to organize a National Night Out party (August 7th)
 - Consider putting together a kit for people in your parish who would be willing to help organize a NNO party
- Getting invited over to a neighbor's house for dinner and sharing some of your spiritual journey with them
- Going to a sporting/music/art event of a child of someone you know

ACTION LEARNING EXPERIMENT ASSIGNMENT OPTIONS

Examples of Action Learning Experiments You Could Try

- A. Prayer Experiment (INVESTING PRESENCE) – Go to a summer neighborhood event, like a county fair or farmers market gathering, and set up a table with your church's name displayed and bunch of strips of cloth on the table. Invite people to write down prayers they have on the strips of cloth and hang them on a display.
- B. Sit on the Front Lawn (INVESTING PRESENCE) – Set up some lawn chairs in the front of wherever you live and commit to sitting in those chairs on a regular basis. Pay attention to what is going on around you, who is outside, what is the neighborhood like, what do you think God might be doing in the neighborhood?
- C. Listen to Spiritual Stories (INVESTING RELATIONSHIP)- After a parish spent time developing their capacity to listen to each other's spiritual stories, they decided to bring that practice into a ministry they are already involved in with women experiencing homelessness. Identify a ministry your church is already involved in where you could make deeper connections with neighbors and practice listening to their spiritual stories.
- D. Go See a Baseball Game (INVESTING RELATIONSHIP) – Are their children in your parish or in your neighborhood who are engaged in a sport, music or art activity over the summer. Consider going to one of their games/recitals/shows to show an interest in what they are doing. When you go, ask what God might be doing in the lives of all the people gathered there.
- E. Eat with Your Neighbor (INVESTING RELATIONSHIP) – Consider developing enough relationship with a neighbor that you can share a meal with that person. See if you can ask that person to tell you one significant story about their spiritual journey during the meal and be willing to share your own.
- F. Borrow a Tool (INVESTING RELATIONSHIP) – Practice engaging your neighbors by borrowing something from them. Could be a lawn tool, a cup of milk, or something else. This will put you in a place where you are vulnerable with your neighbors, allowing them to serve you.
- G. Hangout in a New Place (INVESTING PRESENCE) – Maybe there was a place that you noticed when listening to your neighborhood that you're not as familiar with. Consider planning to spend 30 minutes there several different times over the course of the summer. Who is there? What are they doing? How do you sense God's presence?
- H. Pray at the Laundromat (INVESTING RELATIONSHIP) – Go to a local Laundromat several times over the summer. Get permission to set up a table, offer to pay for people's laundry and also pray for them. (Bishop DeDe's experiment!)

Experiment Design Worksheet

1. Name what you want to learn (learning objective). How is this based on your listening work?
 2. Describe the steps you will take in the experiment.
 3. Create a feedback loop.