

Walking Papers

Congregational connections in their community



Growing congregations always take their neighborhood seriously. So where do you start? This is a 7 step plan for opening up your congregation's doors to the community. This process is perfect for expanding your Sunday School, Children, Youth & Family Ministry or discovering new ministries that meet real needs in your area. Think about this as one step at a time—yet it takes all the steps to reach the destination.

Step 1: Start listening in the congregation. At least some, if not all, of those in worship on Sunday live near your congregation. Invest everyone into this process by using the Congregational Survey in this packet during worship on one or two Sundays. Ask people to complete the survey in a moment of silence during worship as very few forms will return if you send them home. Doing this as a whole congregation at each worship is most successful.

Step 2: Gather a Listening Team. Practice one-on-one listening. Try a few scenarios for experience in listening. The key to good listening involves a series of questions that push past the initial responses to find the heart of the matter. Practice on each other until you feel comfortable and ready to take on the town!

Step 3: Listen in the community. Identify a list of people and organizations to learn from. Think strategically about your area. Include local schools, other organizations that serve families in your area, the police department, local hospitals, small business such as realtors, insurance companies, recreation centers, scout groups, etc. Use the form included in this packet to organize your listening and keep good records.

Step 4: What have you learned? Gather the Listening Team and give them each a stack of post-it notes to record each big learning on one post-it note. Then group similar notes together on the wall so you can visually see the evidence. Connect the dots. Where are the themes? What are the surprises? What validates what you already know? How does this compare to what you learned from the congregation? How is it different?

Step 5: Where do the gifts of the congregation meet the needs of the community? Take a good look at the connection between the assets in your congregation and the opportunities around you. Are there any natural connections? Are there some you can eliminate? What gets people excited?

Step 6: Report this to the congregation. Keep the members in the loop so everyone has some awareness of this process and feels connected. People support what they help create.

Step 7: Form an Action Team. Gather passionate people around the top one or two areas you want to pursue. Re-visit local leaders who can become partners as you build a plan. Involve other churches and organizations by sharing what you have learned and casting the vision for the future. Make a timeline and get started carrying out your mission.



Congregational Survey

Our congregation is ready to connect in the community in new ways. As we listen for God's call to discern where we want to use our assets to respond to needs in the neighborhood, we need your help! Please answer the 5 questions below and return this survey to the usher. This is step one in our process to discover more about the neighborhood. Thanks for being part of this important process.

Please keep our congregation in your prayers as we consider where God is leading us.

1. What do you value most (or are most proud of) about our congregation? Another way to think about this is why do you come to church?

2. What do you see as our top three strengths as a congregation?
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.

3. Think about our community. What do you see as the greatest challenges?

4. What changes have you seen in our community in the past 5 or 10 years?

Do you want to be part of the Community Listening Team? ____yes ____ no

Your Name: _____ Email: _____

Listening Notes

Organization or individual: _____

Phone #'s: _____

Email Address: _____ Website: _____

Introductions:

The role of the person or people in this conversation: _____

1. What do you see as the strengths of _____ in our community?

2. What do you see as the biggest challenges facing _____?

3. Tell me more about _____.

4. If you could solve this problem, what would you do? Why?

5. Who are other people we should listen to about this?

6. Do you have any questions for us?