



Living Our Faith Stories:

Building and strengthening our pastoral relationships

III. The Context For Our Ministries

Who we are called to serve: understanding
our neighbourhoods and communities

A resource of:

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INTRODUCTION

Growing churches are missional churches.

- They have found new ways to go out into their neighbourhoods and communities to listen and learn about their lives: their hopes, quests, and needs.
- They have found new ways to become part of their neighbourhoods and communities – outside and inside the walls of the church building.
- They are building and rebuilding relationships between members of the church and people in the community we are called to serve.
- They are doing this because we are part of the Jesus movement - inspired and encouraged to share God's intention for the world and its people as widely and inclusively as we can.

All missional ministries are contextual. We need to know where we are and we need to know who our neighbours are. This is imperative if we are going to set goals to develop ministries designed to attract newcomers and develop missional outreach to serve and build justice.

A theological reflection (adapted from *Refresh: A Not-so-New Guide to Being Church and Doing Life* by Michael Moynagh & Rob Peabody, 2016).

Jesus's short life leaves in its wake not a new book, not a building, not a religious system, but a community with Jesus inside it – a community that will introduce Jesus, and participate in the fulfillment of God's intentions for us and our world.

Jesus is not inviting you to be an onlooker, a casual Christian. He wants you to be immersed in his community – for a purpose, which is to help share God's kingdom with others. Through you he wants others to see that this world is brimming with kindness, animated by justice, passionate about the environment, and flooded with the presence of Jesus.

God has made you unique and gifted you supernaturally to play a distinct role in bringing this love to people's doorsteps.

This short reflection reminds us that we are gifted - and our gifts are for the sharing of God's love, hope and justice with our neighbours. When we bring these gifts to people's doorsteps in our neighbourhood, who will we meet there?

ASSESSING YOUR CONNECTION WITH YOUR CONTEXT

The following questions will help you assess your knowledge of your context. It will suggest some ways you can develop and deepen your understanding. Finally, it will guide you to seeing how the context for your ministry can shape your living our faith stories goals and activities.

QUESTIONS

Rate the following using a scale from 0 (not at all) to 4 (very much)

	0	1	2	3	4
1. Our congregational leaders have a good knowledge and understanding of the neighbourhoods where our church is located.					
2. Rate how much your neighbourhood has changed in the past 3-5 years.					
3. How much have your outreach and justice building programs and activities changed over the past 3-5 years?					
4. How much have your programs and activities been designed to attract and welcome newcomers changed in the past 3-5 years?					

IF YOUR ANSWER TO #1 is high – proceed to the DISCUSSION QUESTIONS on the next page.

IF YOUR ANSWER TO #1 is low – there are some activities you can do to rebuild your knowledge of the community on the next page.

ACTIVITIES TO BUILD YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE COMMUNITY

- Take a neighbourhood walk (a simple process is included)
- Hold a Community Round Table. (EDGE facilitators information abelaski@united-church.ca)
- If you have some funds, commission an Environics profile of your area
- Do a Missional Audit (example follows)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- A. Together, create a thorough description of the neighbourhoods surrounding your church. It might be helpful to have a map available for people to reference.

If there have been changes over the past 3-5 years, describe what is different.

How well do you see the congregation acknowledging and adapting to these changes? Is your vision directed towards the present and future, or is it focused on the past?

- B. How has the congregation's outreach program changed in the past 3-5 years (other than losing volunteers)? Why has it changed (or not changed)?
- C. What does the congregation do to attract and welcome newcomers? How has this changed in the past 3-5 years? Why has it changed (or not changed)?

PROCESSES TO GET TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD MISSIONAL WALK

*Loving God,
give us eyes to see,
ears to hear, and
words to speak. Amen.*

Missional Walks are a chance to really touch base with our neighbourhoods. Observe, listen, chat. Ask—What is God doing here? They can be a great way to learn about the context for our ministry and mission. They can also be a deeply spiritual exercise. There are a number of ways to take a missional walk. Before getting started take a few moments to reflect on what you are hoping your missional walks will be and do? Choose the option that is best for you.

Option A

- Walk quietly and listen
- Pay attention to who is walking, riding, and driving by
- Notice the homes, gardens, lawn signs, shops, businesses...
- Sit in a café and eavesdrop on conversations (not to be nosey but to learn about what people are interested in)
- Pray for the people you walk past.
- Gather with others from your congregation to compare what we saw and heard.

Option B

- Walk and chat
- Pay attention to who is walking, riding, and driving by
- Notice the homes, gardens, lawn signs, shops, businesses...
- As you can, start up conversations with people about their dog, their baby, their garden ... not about the church unless they bring it up or ask about who you are

- Pray for the people you walk past.
- Gather with others from your congregation to compare what we saw and heard.

Questions for debrief what we saw and heard.

- Who lives here (or spends time here)?
- What do people seem most interested in?
- What do people seem most concerned by?
- What were you most interested in?
- What most concerned you?
- What's the mood of this neighbourhood? (E.G. joyous, energetic, stressed, depressed, calm, placid...)
- How can we be an asset to this neighbourhood?
- How does God want us to be church for the people we saw and heard?
- What do they have to offer us? To teach us?
- How can we open our doors wider?

Taking it a step further

Here are a couple of ideas that will help you get to know the neighbourhood and increase the visibility of your ministries too:

- Hold church meetings at a local café or pub
- Ask your minister to hold their office hours at a local coffee shop one or two days a week

Missional Audit Questions

1. OUR PHYSICAL COMMUNITY:
 - a) Where do people live and gather within our community?
 - b) What influence does our church building have on this?
 - c) In what ways is our property an asset to the community?

2. OUR SOCIAL COMMUNITY
 - a) Who lives here?
 - b) What are the needs?
 - c) In what ways does our church impact these people and their needs?

3. OUR SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY
 - a) What do people in our neighbourhood/community believe in? Do they believe in God? In spirituality?
 - b) What is the church's positive connection and engagement with this?



Living Our Faith Stories Resources

- I. Getting Started**
- II. Prayer and Reflection Resources**
- III. The Context for our Ministries**
- IV. Setting Goals**
- V. The Missional Stretch**
- VI. SMART Goals**