



The Thrive Project:

a season of examination



Winter: a season of examination

As Fall turns into Winter, so a season of education turns into a season of examination. Dynamic energy is unleashed within congregations when everyone is living and serving according to the same, foundational, biblical principles. When our core understanding of God's purpose for our life together is shared in common, we become like the churches described in the Book of Acts!

However, before this hyperbole goes too far, let me add that the church in the Book of Acts includes not only the Apostolic Church at its best, but also churches in Ephesus, Corinth, Galatia, and Rome. Not all of these churches had the same vitality—Rome was the seat of Empire, Galatia wrestled with the relationship between Christ and Judaism, Corinth experienced major conflict, and Ephesus was home to cultural icons that conveyed that the divine could be had for a price.

What is the unique challenge your context presents, and what spiritual gifts have you been given with which to overcome these challenges?

For the Thrive Project's Winter: a season of examination, there is a purpose and every purpose deserves some metrics:

Winter / Examination proposed purpose statement – to enter into a process of discernment that leads to one's becoming aware of the connection places between (1) the congregation's unique, spiritual giftedness, (2) the congregation's deep, abiding passions for ministry, and (3) the community's significant need(s).

Winter / Examination proposed metrics statement – By the conclusion of the Season of Examination, the congregation will have discerned, and the leadership will be able to articulate verbally and in writing, (1) three, congregational spiritual gifts, (2) three abiding passions that energize the congregation for ministry, and (3) three significant community needs which, if met, would bless the community.

We cannot be ourselves if we do not know ourselves; indeed, the journey toward maturity consists of stripping away layer after layer of our *False Self* to embrace the truth that it is our *True Self* that is known and beloved of God.

What is true for individuals is likewise true for congregations. What would it take for your congregation to be able to affirm and articulate its True Self?

During the Season of Examination, there are a variety of



options for inviting congregational discernment. Consider the following ideas:

- (1) *Congregational Survey on Seven Vital Signs*: The survey in the tools section is intended to stimulate discussion, dialogue and discernment among pastors, elders and congregants regarding the current being and future journey of their congregation.
- (2) *Neighborhood Exegetical/Prayer Walk*: Use one of these tools to deepen and broaden your congregation's awareness.
- (3) *MissionInsite Database*: Request from the presbytery a MissionInsite report that provides demographic, economic, educational, lifestyle and religious preference information on the people that live within a defined vicinity of your church.
- (4) *"Lord, Deepen Our Wonder" prayer concerts*: in which the church hosts dedicated times of prayer on each of the six Great Ends, using similar times and groups described in the season of education, but specifically targeted toward,

- *Repentance*: Lord, how have we failed to live with courageous and generous faith?
- *Discernment*: Lord, what would you have us to know, to do, or to become?
- *Wonder*: Lord, show us your Providence and provision beyond our ability!

(5) *Journey Wall*: Create a timeline in the fellowship hall using butcher paper. At a fellowship event (or series of events), ask congregants to share their stories related to the Great Ends:

- The approximate time (by decade or year) when they *personally* experienced God's love and grace through a church whose ministry was guided by the Great Ends. (This can be at the same or a different church.)

- The approximate time (by decade or year) when the church *as a faith community* experienced spiritual insight, deepening, or blessing through one of the Great Ends. (This is, of necessity, an exercise that will be dominated by longer-term members and will help others to hear the congregational story of God's love and grace through the decades.)
- What *themes* emerge from the narrative told in this journey wall? What core values emerge?
- What *chapters* are written by this narrative? How do the different church epochs differ from one another?

For each of the above discernment tasks, the presbytery can provide resources through its Thrive Project facilitators. We have tools to share, and we are in this together. In the Kingdom of God, there is no need to DIY. In the Kingdom of God, we are better together.



The Power of Community

By Brad Munroe, Presbytery Pastor

I learned the power of community at a young age. I was in my late twenties, in my first solo pastorate, participating in a Lily Endowment-funded pastors' cohort: nine newbie leaders and five seasoned leaders from three presbyteries met monthly for eighteen months. The experience molded me in ways I cannot count.

We were at our third meeting and all of us were checking in: "How is it going with your church and with your personal life?" One by one, each of us newbies told about how well our churches were doing, how smart and gifted and pretty we were! I now call this stage of our group life "peacocking," for the ways we tried to pretend we were more than we were.

It was Marty who broke the ice: "Hey, I'm glad none of the rest of you ever have problems, but me, I'm struggling." Marty went on to describe a situation that was familiar to us all, and included his failings as a pastoral leader. We could all relate. The ice had been broken. It was time to get real with one another, to be humble and honest and authentic, to repent and discover God's mercy covered us, too.

Humble, honest, and authentic community is powerful because it invites us to live before, with, and into the divine fellowship of the Triune God. The doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that God's eternal nature and character is expressed as Trinity, as three-in-one, as an ever-loving, ever-flowing dance of loving community. The ancient fathers and mothers even coined the term *perichoresis* to describe this dance of loving community.

There is an old saying that goes, "We is smarter than me." As we consider the Trinity, we might amend this saying, "We is smarter than me, and they—God in Christ, in the power of the Spirit—make us smarter than we will ever be." We need more than *my* wisdom, more than *your* wisdom, more than *our* wisdom; we need the wisdom that comes from above (James 1:5).

This wisdom is ordinarily discovered in community.

One of the hoped-for outcomes of the Thrive Project is that church leaders will avoid the mistake of all top-down leadership: the mistake of believing we have all the answers. Such leadership is like the part of the iceberg visible above the water line—the ideas may be fine, well, and good, but are only a fraction of the wisdom to be found within the entire congregation.



In contrast to all top-down leadership, the Thrive Project is designed to stimulate wider and wider circles of conversation. It is designed for pastors and elders to engage the entire congregation in communal discernment: Who are we in Christ? To whom and for what are we being called? How does God desire to bring blessing to our community through our living together as the Body of Christ? Such wide conversations are like the part of the iceberg found below the surface—embracing a depth of experience, understanding, and wisdom.

One of the lessons I learned during that first pastoral cohort is that an isolated pastor is an unhealthy pastor. I learned other lessons as well: We are stronger together, and smarter and more perseverant, and have more fun. I learned I don't have to have all the answers or be the perfect pastor, just as the church I was leading wasn't the perfect church. I was reminded then, and I remind you today, that we are called to faithfulness. Faithfulness is much easier to find when it's played as a team sport.

One other thing you might find interesting: I'm still friends with Marty.



The Power of Discernment

By Brad Munroe, Presbytery Pastor

I wish to share two scenarios.

In the first, as I listened to the pastor discuss her ministry, I recognized the look in her eye. I have had that look, shared that look, been blessed and cursed by that same look throughout my ministry. It was the look of a leader simultaneously excited and despairing; justifiably proud of her accomplishments to date yet questioning of herself regarding future challenges. Would she have the “right stuff” to lead her people?

In the second, as I listened to the gathered elders around the Session table, their anxiety was palpable. They understood I was visiting with them because others suspected they were a church in trouble: the familiar tune of downsizing, the rhythm of decreased energy and deficit budgets, with lyrics describing the discordant note of difficulties paying their pastor. What should they do?

Both of these congregations were confronting Pentecost Questions. Whether one hears the story of the Church’s birth through God’s sending the Holy Spirit in John 20 or Acts 2, the essential message of Pentecost is the same: God in Christ sends the Holy Spirit and sends us for the sake of God’s mission in the world. We are never alone on this journey. We are always being empowered by God’s presence, acting through the Holy Spirit.

The writer Frederick Buechner famously defined God’s call and our vocation as “where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”¹ Unfortunately for most of us, finding the intersection between our deep gladness or passion and the world’s deep hunger or need can look something like the figure below on the left.

Sorting out the intersections of our lives requires the Pentecost Questions of “Do we have the right stuff?” and “What should we do?” Moving forward requires discernment: listening together to the guidance, conviction, and liberating and so-crazy-it-just-might-



work ideas given through the Holy Spirit. God’s giving of the Holy Spirit to the people of God is not a one-time event, but a continuous connection of God-Life, God-Breathing, and God-Visioning for the sake of God’s community, the Body of Christ, the Church—you and me and us together.

Seeking the discernment of God’s Holy Spirit in community helps us engage our Pentecost Questions in meaningful dialogue until we are able to *see* and to *know* and to *trust* God is calling us forward in faith.

Although I love Buechner’s definition of God’s call and our vocation, I want to add a third point of intersection: our spiritual giftedness. It is often said “God doesn’t call the gifted but gifts the called,” which is true but does not mean God’s gifts only come *after* the call. Sometimes God’s calling has been at work through many years and much spiritual growth, and finding the intersection of our gladness and passion, the world’s deep hunger and need, and our spiritual giftedness can look something like the figure on the right. Then we discover:

¹ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC* (New York: HarperCollins, 1973), 118.



- Our identity and purpose. To whom do we belong and what is our great passion, our joy in ministry? How can we best express God's calling upon us?
- Our spiritual giftedness. What do we do well/best and what unique resources do we possess with which we can bless our neighborhood?
- Our neighbors. What are the physical, social, and spiritual needs of our neighbors?

Pentecost Questions cannot be answered through a one-size-fits-all program, but only responded to through congregation-wide, prayerful, spiritual discernment. An essential component of the Thrive Project is Spirit-led, Session-guided, congregational discernment. If you ask

me, "Brad, what can my church do to thrive?" my answer would be, "Don't ask me, ask the Holy Spirit!" Each of our churches has a unique identity, formed in the image of God, and a sense of giftedness, character, personality, and vocation. Helping an entire congregation recognize and trust the Spirit's naming of your identity comes through discernment. Each of our churches has a unique calling to impact the world for Christ. Helping an entire congregation recognize, trust, and act upon the Spirit's sending of us into our communities comes through discernment.

I invite you to discern together your participation in the Thrive Project. Pray and discuss, discuss and pray, then listen. Do you notice an inner longing? Do you sense an inward blocking? Are others around you opening to God singing a new song among you? Is God presenting new possibilities, opportunities, and challenges for life anew and life abundant? I cannot answer any of these questions for you and would not dare to try. However, I will be so bold as to answer the questions posed at the beginning of this missive. Do you have the right stuff, and what should you do? With God, in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, you do have the right stuff and, as you open yourself to God's new Pentecost, you will know to whom and for what Christ is sending you. We are never alone. We are always being empowered.



The Thrive Project:
tools for the season of examination



Congregational Survey: The Six Great Ends of the Church

INSTRUCTIONS: Circle the number that most corresponds to your opinion: 1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Moderately Disagree, 3 – Moderately Agree, 4 – Strongly Agree, or 5 – No Opinion.

This behavior describes me:

1. I invite friends to church to hear the Gospel.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

2. I have conversations about God or faith with people outside of the church.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

3. I demonstrate genuine concern through acts of love and justice before inviting someone to faith.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

4. I pray for other church members on a regular basis.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

5. I notice when someone is in grief, pain, or discomfort, and then stop, inquire, listen, care, and pray for that person.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

6. I seek out visitors to offer welcome and greeting, and to invite them to other events (e.g. lunch, potluck, Bible study, etc.).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

7. I participate regularly in the gathering of the worshiping community to observe Sabbath.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

8. I read Scripture devotionally.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

9. I seek in my experience of worship to glorify God in thought, word, and deed.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

10. I pray, then ponder, contemplate, and converse about what I am hearing, reading, and doing, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide my actions.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

11. I act in ways such that what I do publicly and privately express a unity, a life of integrity, where my reputation, character, and behavior are integrated.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

12. I study Scripture, the historic confessions and read contemporary works that connect faith to life.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

13. I participate in the congregation's *passive* ministries of compassion (e.g. donating canned goods and gently used clothes, or writing a check, etc.).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

14. I volunteer in the congregation's *active* compassion ministries (e.g. reading to school children, serving at a soup kitchen, or helping Habitat for Humanity build a home, etc.).

1	2	3	4	5
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Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion
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15. I seek *mutual* mission engagement, serving “with” rather than “for” others, building relationships of mutuality that break down hierarchical, “Big Brother/Sister” interactions in favor of “We, together....”

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

16. I practice hospitality and welcome toward strangers.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

17. I cultivate the practice of civility and respect with intentionality, especially toward those with whom I disagree.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

18. I demonstrate care toward every part of God’s creation.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

19. The numbers of the three behaviors described in the section above (#1-18) that I do most often are:

#____, #____, #____

20. The numbers of the three behaviors described in the section above (#1-18) that I do least often are:

#____, #____, #____

This behavior describes our congregation when viewed collectively:

21. We train members in how to share their faith story with others.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

22. We generate members who demonstrate a willingness to offer mercy, to speak the truth in love, and to look beyond their own good to the concerns of a wider world with humility and joy.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly	Moderately	Moderately	Strongly	No Opinion

Disagree **Disagree** **Agree** **Agree**

23. We equip members to invite personal faith and have conversations that nurture a relationship with God.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**
Strongly **Moderately** **Moderately** **Strongly** **No Opinion**
Disagree **Disagree** **Agree** **Agree**

24. We regularly communicate to all members how to request prayer for oneself or others and then pray for one another in worship and throughout the week.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**
Strongly **Moderately** **Moderately** **Strongly** **No Opinion**
Disagree **Disagree** **Agree** **Agree**

25. We organize, train, and send deacons, Stephen Ministers, and pastors to visit those in the hospital, homebound, or confined to an institution.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**
Strongly **Moderately** **Moderately** **Strongly** **No Opinion**
Disagree **Disagree** **Agree** **Agree**

26. We ensure our building structure and administrative practices emphasize accessibility.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**
Strongly **Moderately** **Moderately** **Strongly** **No Opinion**
Disagree **Disagree** **Agree** **Agree**

27. We center all worship on the person, character, and saving actions of God in Jesus Christ.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**
Strongly **Moderately** **Moderately** **Strongly** **No Opinion**
Disagree **Disagree** **Agree** **Agree**

28. We craft worship around the Word – music, prayer and all other elements point to the Word.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**
Strongly **Moderately** **Moderately** **Strongly** **No Opinion**
Disagree **Disagree** **Agree** **Agree**

29. We create opportunities for members to use their spiritual gifts in worship.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**
Strongly **Moderately** **Moderately** **Strongly** **No Opinion**
Disagree **Disagree** **Agree** **Agree**

30. We teach Scripture, the historic tradition, and contemporary application of faith to life.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

31. We facilitate discussion of personal, local, national and global events through the lens of Biblical values to offer insight, critique, and affirmation as appropriate.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

32. We create opportunities for members to express Biblical values through service in the church and in the community.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

33. We provide opportunities for members to express care for others through *passive* compassion ministries (e.g. food drives, clothing drives and financial giving, etc.).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

34. We provide opportunities for members to express care for others through *active* compassion ministries (e.g. Habitat for Humanity, school reading programs, Family Promise, etc.).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

35. We advocate for just policies and laws, especially for minorities, people living in poverty, and any other group that has the potential to be marginalized or disenfranchised.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

36. We serve the community more than we serve ourselves, toward the motto: Be a helper, not an obstacle; Be a giver, not a taker; Be a friend, not an adversary.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

37. We discuss issues of the day, regardless of how sensitive the topic, with courage and kindness because members possess a spirit of love, grace, and humility toward one another.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

38. We have an intentional focus on both friend and stranger, both neighbor and the world, both the Kingdom now and the Kingdom to come.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	No Opinion

39. The numbers of the three behaviors described in the section above (#21-38) that we do most often are:

#____, #____, #____

40. The numbers of the three behaviors described in the section above (#21-38) that we do least often are:

#____, #____, #____

41. Are you currently serving as an officer (elder, deacon or pastor) of the church? Yes No

Instructions for Using the Survey

Purpose

The purpose of the survey is to discern those places where there is a common vision or divergent opinions among leadership and the congregation and help accomplish the following:

1. Encourage self-examination toward healthy self-awareness, honesty, and accountability.
2. Identify those topics where leadership and the congregation have agreement/hold common values vs. those topics where there is significant divergence of opinion/perspective among leadership.
3. Focus leadership discussions on those topics most in need of clarity and shared vision.
4. Suggest possibilities for fruitful exploration toward growing deeper into faithfulness to God's call.

Process

1. Have respondents return their completed forms to a designated person at the church. One person/committee should be tasked with compiling the data.
2. Sort surveys into two groups: current officers of the church and not currently an officer.
3. Score each response as follows: group responses #1 and #2 (strongly and moderately disagree) into one group, responses #3 and #4 (moderately and strongly agree) into a second group, and response #5 (no opinion) into a third group. Note these responses in a graph.
4. The questions in both sections (individual and congregation) are ordered in groups of three according to the order of the Great Ends (e.g. the first three questions refer to the first Great End, the second three questions refer to the second Great End, etc.). Create a graph that compares current leadership with non-leadership members and compares each of the six Great Ends to each other.
5. Prior to the meeting at which the survey results will be discussed, send the compiled data to participants (usually elders, though you may choose to include a wider group of folks).
6. The topic of conversation will be to review the results and ask the following questions:
 - a. What do we do well? What are our strengths?
 - b. What needs work? Where might we need to grow?
 - c. Where do we share a common vision, values, and/or self-evaluation?
 - d. Where do we have divergent views regarding our vision, values, and/or self-evaluation?
 - e. Are we being called to emphasize our strengths or nurture our growth areas?
 - f. What might be some short-term goals for growing toward deeper faithfulness or a more united vision for our ministry?
 - g. What resources do we have that help us in our faithfulness?
 - h. What resources might we need to cultivate as we grow toward deeper faithfulness?
 - i. What are the gaps in our ministry that need to be addressed immediately? Over time?
 - j. How are we discerning the call of God's Spirit?
 - k. What is the horizon toward which God seems to be calling us to grow?



Congregational Focus Groups: the six great ends of the church

INSTRUCTIONS

Event Coordinator

Pre-Event Role

1. Invites congregation and explains how participation will help ministry and what's in it for them
2. Recruits and trains facilitators and helpers
3. Arranges venue and coordinates set up
4. Coordinates check in registration process and staffing

At Event

1. Welcomes and thanks everyone
2. Introduces facilitators and helpers; explains their role
3. Requests cell phones be put on silent and stored out of sight
4. Explains what's going to happen today
5. Explains what results will be used for
6. Describes guidelines for small group conversations
7. Indicate there are no right or wrong answers
8. You don't need to agree with others
9. Need to listen respectfully as others share their views
10. Leads closing plenary session

Characteristics of the Small Groups

Participants

1. All congregants, officers and church staff invited
2. Preregistered if possible to assign to conversation groups prior to day of event
3. No more than 8 people per group, including facilitator and helper

Environment

1. Room set up in advance with at least six tables or chair circles for eight people each
2. Comfortable room temperature; good air circulation
3. Circle seating; round tables if possible
4. Iced water readily available

Facilitator

1. Skillful in group discussions; establishes permissive environment
2. Uses pre-determined questions
3. Does not participate in discussion except to get clarification from participants

Helper

1. Seated at table or chair circle prior to participants arrival; welcomes participants as they are seated
2. Takes selected notes throughout the discussion; not meant to be a comprehensive recording of everything said;
3. Do not use a computer or electronic device for note taking
4. Makes sure iced water is replenished between group shifts
5. Sees that notes are given to Event Coordinator either on day of event or on next day if they need to be rewritten or word processed
6. Does not participate in discussion except to get clarification from participants
7. One or more of the helpers need to take notes of the closing plenary session

On Being a Good Facilitator

The good facilitator

1. Exercises mild unobtrusive conversation management
2. Has prior knowledge of topic; has carefully read and studied Great Ends questionnaire

Use pauses and probes

1. Don't worry about empty space in conversation; 5 second pause OK
2. Probes: "Would you explain further?" "Would you give an example?" "I don't understand."

Be mentally prepared

1. Alert and free from distractions
2. Has the discipline of listening?
3. Familiar with probing route

Control reactions to participants

1. Be careful about your own verbal and nonverbal reactions
2. No head nodding or head shaking
3. No short verbal responses (don't say "that's good" or "excellent")

Use purposeful small talk

1. Create warm and friendly environment

Use subtle group management of the

1. "Experts;" dominant talkers; shy participants; and ramblers

Make a smooth and snappy introduction

1. Event Coordinator has already spoken; don't repeat
2. Along the way, dynamics of the group may require reminder of ground rules

Note Taking

Note taking is the responsibility of the helper.

Notes need to be given to Event Coordinator.

Notes need to be read by others.

1. May need to rewrite or word process after event and before giving to Event Coordinator. Notes sometimes are interpreted days or weeks following the conversations when memory has faded.

Record quotes.

1. Not everything said needs to be recorded. Listen for statements that illustrate an important point of view. Listen for phrases that are particularly enlightening or eloquently express a point of view. It is impossible to capture the entire quote. Capture as much as you can.

Record key points and themes.

1. Participants will talk about several key points in response to each question. Several different participants will identify the same points. Don't need to repeat everything. Sometimes they are said only once but in a manner that deserves attention.

Follow-up questions.

2. The facilitator may fail to follow-up on an important point or seek an example of a vague but critical point. The helper may need to follow-up with these questions during or at the end of the conversation.
3. *Big ideas, hunches, or thoughts of the helper.*
4. Occasionally the helper will discover a new concept. A light will go on and something will make sense when before it did not. These insights need to be recorder, but not interjected into the conversation.

Conducting the Small Group Discussion

1. Divide participants into groups (divisive of six) and randomly assign each group one of the Great Ends to discuss. The group size may vary but must not exceed eight persons per group, including the facilitator and helper. Assignment to groups can occur prior to event and/or upon arrival at event.
2. Each group has a facilitator for the conversation whose job is to ensure everyone's voice is heard. Each group also has a helper whose job is to take notes and be a friendly presence. Neither the facilitator nor the helper shares their opinions during the conversations. They need to focus their attention on facilitating and recording the discussion.
3. Pass out the list of individual and congregational observable behaviors found on the following pages of this handbook.
4. Give participants five minutes of silence to read the ten individual and ten congregational behaviors that express faithfulness toward a Great End. (Extroverts, please remain silent for the full five minutes, even if you have finished reading the list – your Introvert friends will thank you.)

5. At the end of five minutes, give each group fifteen minutes to respond to the following questions:
 - a. What do we do well at our church regarding this Great End? What are our strengths?
 - b. What needs work at our church regarding this Great End? Where might we need to grow?
 - c. What are tangible ways we express faithfulness at our church to this Great End?
6. Have each group move clockwise to a different table to repeat the process, discussing a different Great End. The process can be repeated as many times as desired, depending on the church's schedule and participants' willingness to continue the conversation.
7. Leave enough time in the schedule to allow the final 20 minutes to be a plenary discussion that ranks the six Great Ends into three categories: (a) the two to which we are most faithful, (b) the two about which we are working but have room to improve, and (c) the two to which we are least faithful.
8. Share the results of the conversation groups with the Session so that they may engage the following questions:
 - a. What do we do well? What are our strengths?
 - b. What needs work? Where might we need to grow?
 - c. Where do we share a common vision, values, and/or self-evaluation?
 - d. Where do we have divergent views regarding our vision, values, and/or self-evaluation?
 - e. Are we being called to emphasize our strengths or nurture our growth areas?
 - f. What might be some short-term goals for growing toward deeper faithfulness or a more united vision for our ministry
 - g. What resources do we have that help us in our faithfulness?
 - h. What resources might we need to cultivate as we grow toward deeper faithfulness?
 - i. What are the gaps in our ministry that need to be addressed immediately? Over time?
 - j. How are we discerning the call of God's Spirit?
 - k. What is the horizon toward which God seems to be calling us to grow?

Great End #1 - The Proclamation of the Gospel for the Salvation of Humankind

Individual Observable Behaviors – The individual who lives the first Great End with faithfulness:

1. Invites a friend to church to hear the Gospel.
2. Tells another person their story of coming to faith.
3. Tells another person what God means to them in their life.
4. Tells another person how Scripture declares God's love for all.
5. Is described by others as having at least three of the following characteristics *while sharing her or his faith*: authentic, personal, warm, honest, open, inquisitive, empathetic, and humorous.
6. Understands that the integrity of her relationships, actions, and words serves as a basis upon which her witness to faith will be judged.
7. Has conversations about God or faith with people outside of the church.
8. Demonstrates genuine concern through acts of love and justice before inviting someone to faith.
9. Is present with people in difficult situations as a witness to God's care and justice in the world.
10. Says to another, "What can I do for you in the name of Christ today?"

Congregational Observable Behaviors – The congregation who lives the first Great End with faithfulness:

1. Encourages its members to share their faith story with others.
2. Trains its members in how to share their faith story with others.
3. Has members practice sharing their faith story with one another in worship, small groups, at Session/Deacons and its committees in both verbal and written form.
4. Teaches/wrestles with the meaning of salvation and has a clearly defined, broad-consensus definition of salvation that is understood and regularly articulated within the congregation.
5. Generates members who demonstrate a willingness to offer mercy, to speak the truth in love, and to look beyond their own good to the concerns of a wider world with humility and joy.
6. Equips its members to invite personal faith and have conversations that nurture a relationship with God when those who are without faith, those seeking faith, and those of fragile faith come to worship or another church event.
7. Talks about the difficult questions about faith and the Bible.
8. Performs acts in the world that bear witness to God's love for the world as proclaimed in scripture.
9. Shares faith-based posts on social media.
10. Baptizes adults at least several times a year



Great End #2 – The Shelter, Nurture, and Spiritual Fellowship of the People of God

Individual Observable Behaviors – The individual who lives the second Great End with faithfulness:

1. Prays for other church members on a regular basis.
2. Shares one's life experiences and God experiences in conversation with other church members.
3. Instructs children and youth on the nature and practices of the Christian life.
4. Visits church members who are in the hospital, homebound, or confined to an institution.
5. Participates with deacons or pastors in ministries of care.
6. Notices when someone is in grief, pain, or discomfort, and then stops, inquires, listens, cares, and responds to that person with prayer or action.
7. Learns people's names whenever possible and is not afraid to ask for someone's name if they forget it.
8. Seeks out visitors to offer welcome and greeting, and to invite them to other events (e.g. lunch, potluck, Bible study).
9. Provides full-time caregiving and nurture to an elderly husband or wife and ensures their continued quality of life.
10. Encourages the presence of children and youth in church through tolerating noise or commotion while yet modeling and guiding young ones toward learning the ways of respectfully being church together.

Congregational Observable Behaviors – The congregation who lives the second Great End with faithfulness:

1. Regularly communicates to all members how to request prayer for oneself or others and then prays for one another in worship and throughout the week.
2. Organizes, trains, and sends deacons, Stephen Ministers, and pastors to visit those in the hospital, homebound, or confined to an institution.
3. Educates its members in how to refer people to and utilize community services (e.g. memory care, low vision, low-income housing, etc.).
4. Promotes care groups (e.g. 12-Step groups, Divorce Recovery).
5. Ensures its building structure and administrative practices emphasize accessibility.
6. Celebrates life events (e.g. births, graduations, anniversaries, achievements).
7. Creates opportunities for church members to share life experiences and God experiences in smaller, more intimate settings.
8. Instructs and trains younger disciples in the practices of the Christian life.
9. Organizes mentoring relationships between older adults, youth, and children.
10. The following types of events/experiences are the norm:
 - a. A member suffers from a spinal deformity. She doesn't like to go out at all because people point and stare. At church, we see her for who she is and she feels "sheltered" from the mean actions of others.
 - b. One of the church's official photographers is legally blind. He is still a part of the team—his sense of worth is nurtured even though his contribution may be "fuzzy."
 - c. Each week about 50–80 people regularly sign a "thinking of you card" for one of the members who is unable to attend. While the recipient may not know every signer, the sheer number of individual signatures wraps that person in a spiritual fellowship.
 - d. A committed foster parent brings children born with special needs into her home, particularly infants who need constant nurture. These children are welcomed in worship and church events by the entire congregation.
 - e. Members handknit blankets which are then prayed over by deacons and other congregants and given to people in need of prayer and blessing, such as those facing surgery, those who are in hospice, or those who have made a decision to move to a home closer to family.



Great End #3 – The Maintenance of Divine Worship

Individual Observable Behaviors – The individual who lives the maintenance of divine worship:

1. Participates regularly in the gathering of the worshiping community to observe Sabbath.
2. Prays on a daily basis.
3. Prays praise, adoration, and thanksgiving (focus on God) as well as confession and petition (focus on us).
4. Prays with a time set aside for silence in order simply to be with God, listen, and experience God's presence.
5. Reads Scripture devotionally.
6. Studies Scripture in-depth.
7. Practices the Prayer of Examen/Reflection at the end of the day to connect one's daily life to God.
8. Seeks in one's experience of worship to glorify God in thought, word, and deed.
9. Is open in one's experience of worship to move beyond education to transformation, beyond "What am I getting out of this?" to "How can I bless God and those around me?" and beyond mere words to becoming like Jesus.
1. Sings like she or he means it!

Congregational Observable Behaviors – The congregation who lives the maintenance of divine worship:

1. Centers all worship on the person, character, and saving actions of God in Jesus Christ.
2. Crafts worship around the Word—music, prayer, and all other elements point to the Word.
3. Crafts worship in ways that:
 - a. engage the mind yet allow times for silence, personal reflection, and personal response;
 - b. connect the Word proclaimed to God's call upon us to live as instruments of God's grace, mercy, and peace in the world;
 - c. bring awareness of ancient liturgical rhythms and modern, contemporary expression;
 - d. balance "Presbyterian wordiness" with creative, multi-sensory rituals that engage the whole person;
 - e. make room in worship for mystery and awe, and expect to encounter the Holy Spirit; and
 - f. incorporate intentionally designed "sending" rituals.
4. Trains liturgists in the practice of leading and trains ushers and greeters in the art of hospitality.
5. Creates opportunities for members to use their spiritual gifts in worship.
6. Remembers and responds to those who cannot be in worship either because of health (e.g. homebound, nursing home residents) or vocation (first responders).
7. Generously finances the maintenance of divine worship.
8. Provides and prepares creative and appropriate worship spaces.
9. Nurtures the congregation's worship life through elements they have memorized and can repeat together.
10. Enjoys a large and varied repertoire of congregational songs.



Great End #4 – The Preservation of the Truth

(Discipleship as the Living Experience of Jesus, the Truth)

Individual Observable Behaviors – The individual who preserves the truth:

1. Listens to the sermon and allows God to influence them through it.
2. Reads Scripture, studies the historic confessions, and reads contemporary works that connect faith to life.
3. Prays, then ponders, contemplates, and converses about what one is hearing, reading, and doing, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide one's actions.
4. Sets life goals that conform to Biblical values.
5. Acts in ways such that what one does publicly and privately express a unity, a life of integrity, where one's reputation, character, and behavior are integrated.
6. Practices the faith in daily life beyond the politically popular/correct issues, including also the practices of humility and hope, justice and joy, a willingness to seek and offer mercy, and looking beyond their own good to the concerns of a wider world.
7. Courageously yet politely calls out prejudice, injustice, and distortions of the Christian faith, verbally and in writing, through interpersonal conversations, in small groups, and on social media, always remembering to speak the truth in love (especially on social media!).
8. Thinks globally and acts locally.
9. Treats other people—all other people—according to their being created in *imago dei* (the image of God).
10. Responds to seasons of spiritual blandness—aka, “The Wall,” “The Dark Night of the Soul”—with patience and perseverance, continuing to practice the faith and seeking deeper means of hearing God's Word and Spirit.

Congregational Observable Behaviors – The congregation who lives the preservation of the truth:

1. Teaches Scripture, the historic tradition, and contemporary application of faith to life.
2. Trains people in both ancient and contemporary practices of prayer.
3. Trains people in living one's faith in daily life.
4. Offers discipleship curricula with different entry points: seeker, beginner, intermediate, and advanced.
5. Offers discipleship curricula on ways to get unstuck in one's spiritual journey—aka, beyond “The Wall” or beyond “The Dark Night of the Soul.”
6. Facilitates discussion of personal, local, national, and global events through the lens of Biblical values to offer insight, critique, and affirmation as appropriate.
7. Creates opportunities for members to express Biblical values through service in the church and in the community.
8. Encourages the sharing of diverse perspectives as a means of seeking God's truth.
9. Participates in, financially supports, and promotes activities that advocate Christian values in the public sphere.
10. Expects to be kept apprised of denominational positions on current events, including potentially divisive subjects.



Great End #5 – The Promotion of Social Righteousness

Individual Observable Behaviors – The individual who promotes social righteousness:

1. Participates in the congregation's *passive* ministries of compassion (e.g. donating canned goods and gently used clothes, or writing a check, etc.).
2. Volunteers in the congregation's *active* compassion ministries (e.g. reading to school children, serving at a soup kitchen, or helping Habitat for Humanity build a home, etc.).
3. Prays for those whom Jesus called "the least of these, my brothers and sisters," whether in one's community, the nation, or around the world.
4. Seeks *cooperative* mission engagement, asking those one seeks to serve, "What is it that you would find helpful?" Then, only after listening to the answer, responding as one is capable.
5. Seeks *mutual* mission engagement, serving "with" rather than "for" others, building relationships of mutuality that break down hierarchical, "Big Brother/Sister" interactions in favor of "We, together...."
6. Seeks to become more educated about the history of religious protest and historic issues that impact today's events (e.g. Doctrine of Discovery, Abolitionists, Great Reforms of the Early 20th Century, Women's Suffrage, Civil Rights, etc.).
7. Seeks to become more educated about economic, social, cultural, and political issues that impact minorities, people living in poverty, and any other group that has the potential to be marginalized or disenfranchised.
8. Advocates for just and humane policies and laws in the public square, especially those policies and laws related to the protection of minorities, people living in poverty, and any other group that has the potential to be marginalized or disenfranchised.
9. Kindly and consistently confronts actions and attitudes of racism, homophobia, xenophobia, sexism, and ageism, first looking to oneself and then to the actions and attitudes of others.
1. Practices good stewardship through living responsibly, disavowing consumerism in favor of generosity.



Congregational Observable Behaviors – The congregation who promotes social righteousness:

1. Provides opportunities for members to express care for others through *passive* compassion ministries (e.g. food drives, clothing drives, and financial giving, etc.).
2. Provides opportunities for members to express care for others through *active* compassion ministries (e.g. Habitat for Humanity, school reading programs, Family Promise, etc.).
3. Works with existing community organizations who provide care in the community.
4. Organizes and promotes new ministries that provide care in the community.
5. Includes in worship opportunities for prayer and other liturgical elements that uphold social righteousness.
6. Educates the congregation on social ethics by connecting Scripture to real-world issues confronting our communities, state, nation, and world.
7. Educates the congregation about the history of religious protest and historic issues that impact today's events (e.g. Doctrine of Discovery, Abolitionists, Great Reforms of the Early 20th Century, Women's Suffrage, Civil Rights, etc.).
8. Educates the congregation on sociological, economic, and political complexities that impact minorities, people living in poverty, and any other group that has the potential to be marginalized or disenfranchised.
9. We advocate for just policies and laws, especially for minorities, people living in poverty, and any other group that has the potential to be marginalized or disenfranchised.
10. Educates the congregation on the values and practices of good stewardship, living responsibly in the world, and the importance of disavowing consumerism in favor of generosity.

Great End #6 – The Exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the World

Individual Observable Behaviors – The individual who exhibits the kingdom of heaven to the world:

1. Practices hospitality and welcome toward strangers.
2. Cultivates friendships with all people regardless of social, economic, racial, national, or sexual status/orientation.
3. Practices equality and protects the human dignity of all people.
4. Lives in ways that affirm faith, hope, and love and that reject fear, despair, and judgment.
5. Lives with humility before God and others, demonstrating respect toward all people.
6. Cultivates the practice of civility and respect with intentionality, especially toward those with whom they disagree.
7. Practices active listening and the use of “I-language” as a means of creating connection through communication.
8. Refrains from seeking control over others through “having the same mind that was in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5–11).
9. Demonstrates care toward every part of God’s creation.
10. Lives the first five Great Ends fully, wholly, completely, and utterly (Greek: *telios*)!

Congregational Observable Behaviors – The congregation who exhibits the kingdom of heaven:

1. Trains its members in the ministry of welcome and hospitality.
2. Has an official, written policy of openness and inclusivity that is communicated to members.
3. Discusses ways its congregational customs either create welcome or convey unwelcome, making changes as needed.
4. Contextualizes their worship, fellowship, and educational ministries for the people living in their neighborhood.
5. Serves the community more than it serves itself, toward the motto: Be a helper, not an obstacle; Be a giver, not a taker; Be a friend, not an adversary.
6. Promotes and trains congregants in healthy communication best practices (e.g. active listening, I-language, etc.).
7. Promotes and trains congregants in conflict reconciliation best practices (e.g. empathy building, interest-based negotiation, etc.).
8. Discusses issues of the day, regardless of how sensitive the topic, with courage and kindness because members possess a spirit of love, grace, and humility toward one another.
9. Has an intentional focus on both friend and stranger, both neighbor and the world, both the Kingdom now and the Kingdom to come.
10. Participates together as a congregation in ministries of creation care.





Exploring Your Neighborhood: An Exegetical Walk²

The word *Exegesis* literally means a *critical interpretation* and is commonly applied to the study of literature. As readers of the Bible, we exegete the text with a view to discerning its truth for our lives. In this exercise, you're invited to undertake an exegesis—a critical interpretation—of your neighborhood. Through careful, sensitive, and critical observation, your task is to discern the truth of God's presence where you live. Quite simply, it's about reading your neighborhood as one of the primary texts of daily life—one through which God speaks.

To do this properly, you need to set aside two hours of uninterrupted time. Before you head out, think about how you define your neighborhood and how it's physically laid out. Draw yourself a map, including your own home, basic street patterns, and any landmarks, commercial or community buildings, schools, or parks. Be sure to include those boundary markers or natural borders that give your neighborhood definition. For some, the neighborhood will be larger than for others. It's a very personal thing; no one else can define it for you. The only criteria are that it includes where you live and is walkable. Once you've got a rough idea in mind of what area to include, grab a notebook and pen and head off.

Be sure to include time along the way to stop, buy a drink somewhere, sit in a park or at a bus stop, and linger outside public buildings or places of interest. There's no hurry. Here's a list of question to help you as you go:

1. As you stand just outside your house or apartment—by the front gate or on the footpath—what do you see as you look in each direction? What do you hear or sense? What activities do you notice?
2. As you walk the neighborhood, what do you notice about the architecture of the houses or apartment complexes? On average, how old do you think the

houses or apartments are in the area? How much renovation or rebuilding is going on?

3. What do you notice about the front gardens or entrance ways to each of the houses or apartments? Does your neighborhood feel like a cared-for place?
4. How many houses or apartments for sale do you see? What indicators of transience do you observe? Does the neighborhood have a feeling of permanence or change?
5. Is there a freeway or major highway close by? If so, try to imagine this area before it existed. Who has gained or lost by its introduction?



6. Stop—sit if you can—in a tree-lined street or quieter spot, then at a busy intersection. What are the smells and sounds of the neighborhood? How quiet or noisy is it?
7. How many community or civic buildings do you see? What are their purposes? Do they look inviting, well-used, deserted?

² Adapted from Simon Carey Holt, *God Next Door: Spirituality and Mission in the Neighborhood* (Brunswick East, Victoria, AU: Acorn Press, 2007), 103–104. Taken from the Center for Parish Development, *Joining God in the Neighborhood: Resources for Field Trips* (Chicago: Missional Church, DATE), 3–5). Used with permission.

8. What public spaces are provided for children, teenagers, or adults? Are they being used? If so, in what ways?
9. If there is a local park, what do you notice about it? Does it feel like a welcoming or inhibiting place? Who is there? How is it used?
10. Do you pass churches or religious buildings? What does their design or appearance communicate to you?
11. What kinds of commercial buildings are there? Walk around a supermarket or local store and identify who makes up the clientele.
12. If your neighborhood includes a shopping area, is there provision made for people to sit, relax, or relate?
13. Excluding the areas of business, how many people did you pass while walking? What age, race, and gender are they? How pedestrian-friendly is the neighborhood?
14. Imagine yourself as an old, infirm person with no car, or as a young child, living in the middle of this neighborhood. How disadvantaged or advantaged would you be with respect to shops, churches, parks, or schools?
15. What evidence is there of public transport? Who uses it?
16. Are there places in your neighborhood that you wouldn't go?
17. Where are the places of life, hope, beauty, or community in this neighborhood?
18. What evidence of struggle, despair, neglect, and alienation do you see?
19. What sense of connection do you feel to your neighborhood as you walk through it?
20. In what ways do you sense God's presence where you live?



Prayer-Walking Guide³

What is prayer-walking? One simple definition: “Praying on-site with insight.” The purpose of prayer-walking is to seek God’s blessing, mercy, and transforming power, for the community and ourselves, and to become more aware of what we see by connecting prayer-walking with structured observation.

General Guidelines for Prayer-Walking

- Meet at an assigned time and start with group prayer.
- Walk in groups of two or three. Plan routes ahead of time to cover as much of the designated area as possible.
- Pray aloud in a quiet, conversational voice, if you feel comfortable doing so, or pray silently. Don’t call attention to yourselves. As WayMakers puts it, “You can be on the scene without making one.”
- If anyone asks what you are doing, be prepared to respond: “We’re praying God’s blessing on this neighborhood. Is there any way we can pray for you?”
- Although it is not the primary purpose of prayer-walking, be open to opportunities to interact with and bless people.

As you pray God’s promises with specific homes or work sites in view, you’ll find that hope for those people begins to grow. You’ll begin to see people as God might view them. You’ll likely find yourself becoming more interested in the welfare of the people you are praying for. Watch for the ways God impresses you to display Christ’s love in practical acts of kindness.

- Plan to walk for about half an hour. If anyone in your group is not comfortable with walking, they can prayer-drive around the neighborhood instead.

- Gather to share your prayers, observations, and experiences. What did you learn about the neighborhood? Where was God in this experience?
- Encourage people to continue praying for the community during the week.

How Do You Pray?

- *Pray for discernment*—seek the gift of seeing the community through God’s eyes, and to discern what God is already doing among the people. Ask God to reveal what you need to know to inform your prayer for the people, events, and places in the community.
- *Pray for blessing*—for every person, home, and business you encounter; for God’s grace in each life; for God’s will to be done in this community “as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).
- *Pray with empathy*—see and feel what residents live with. Pray for those things that express brokenness and grieve God’s spirit and give thanks to God for the blessings and gifts that exist in the community.
- *Pray from scripture*—prayers based directly on God’s word can be especially powerful. You may want to bring a Bible with key passages highlighted or copy verses onto note cards.
- *Pray in God’s power*—allow for silence (Romans 8:26), yet be bold, too (John 14:12-14).



³ Inspired by WayMakers, “What is Prayerwalking?” www.waymakers.org/prayerwalking.html.



MissionInsite Database

MissionInsite⁴ is a database tool that culls data from the U.S. Census, the Gallup Poll, Barna Research, Pew Foundation Research, and other sources to paint a picture of your community. The information included in a MissionInsite report includes:

- demographic data,
- lifestyle preferences (e.g. hobbies; how a household accesses the news; use of social media; top concerns in a household, community, or of national interest, etc.), and
- religious preferences (e.g. denominational affiliation, reasons for not participating in a church, reasons why one might stop participating in a church, most attractive programs, etc.).

Churches requesting a MissionInsite report will receive a “snapshot” of the neighborhood surrounding the congregation. The information from these data reports can be used to help congregations accomplish objectives outlined in the Thrive Project’s Season of Examination:

- Understand who your neighbors are and where different neighbors live.
- Identify the possible connection points between your congregation and your neighborhood.
- Help a Session and congregation make more informed decisions about where to focus ministry.

To request a MissionInsite report, contact Kevin Oxnam by email (kevinenam@gmail.com). ⁵You will need to provide the following information to Kevin:

- Your name, telephone number, and email address.
- Your church’s name, your pastor’s name, and pastor’s email address.
- The search parameters desired in order to focus the report. Options include (a) specific zip codes, (b) an *n*-mile radius around the church, (c) an *n*-mile drive from the church, or (d) specific parameters of your choosing.

When the MissionInsite report is completed, Kevin will email it to you—and then the work begins! The “snapshot” will be a 30-page document flooded with data. Thrive facilitators recommend the report be handed to members of the congregation who love playing with data. Assign a group of 2 – 5 “data junkies” to read, pray over, discuss and discern what they see in the report, and then provide the Session with a one-page summary:

- What are 2–5 possibilities?
- What are 2–5 challenges?
- What are the 2–5 places where the congregation’s passion and giftedness overlaps with the neighborhood’s concerns and needs?

Now for the fun part: What do *your* pastor, elders, and church members, together, hope and dream? How do *all y’all* hear the Spirit’s leading? What, then, shall you do?

⁴ See <https://missioninsite.com/> for more information.

⁵ This offer only applies to churches within Presbytery of Grand Canyon and Presbytery de Cristo.



Appreciative Inquiry: Memories, Hopes and Conversations

Key to success is high participation in a positive, well-implemented church-wide event.

1. The purpose of an Appreciative Inquiry exercise is to seek the following:
 - Clarity about yourself as a congregation,
 - Being energized toward your shared future,
 - Replacing a background of confusion and malaise about future prospects with a positive and hopeful outlook that continues into the next phases of transition.

A good process takes the needed time at each step. Solid work will reap commensurate rewards.

2. Implementation of a Church-Wide Event. Set aside a day and time period and issue explicit invitations.

Tables: 6–8 people per table. Each table should have the following resources:

- Interview question sheets for each person
 - Pens/pencils
 - Colored crayons and markers (lots)
 - A LARGE newsprint-size “Post-it”
3. Interviews: Use “Memories, Hopes, and Conversations” sheet on the next page.

Use the following explanatory script:

- In front of you there is a sheet with three questions on it. Break into pairs for mutual interviews. You will take turns responding to each question, while the other listens and takes notes. Each person will have 8 minutes to respond to the first question, so the first question will take 16 minutes.
- Take a moment to think about the first question. Decide who will respond first, while the other person listens and takes notes. In 8 minutes, we will let you know it is time to trade roles and let the other person respond while you take notes.
- It’s time to trade roles. In 8 minutes, I will let you know it is time to move on to the next question.
- The next two questions will take 6 minutes for each person—12 minutes per question.

Data Collection: On large sheets of paper posted around the room, have participants write responses to the following:

- What themes emerge from the narrative being told in this appreciative inquiry?
- What core values are emerging?
- What hopes, dreams, and possibilities are emerging?
- What challenges need to be confronted with repentance?



Appreciative Inquiry: Memories, Hopes, and Conversations

Interviewee _____ Interviewer _____
Date _____

1. Remembering my entire experience at our church, when was I most alive, most motivated and excited about my involvement? What happened? What was my part? How did I feel?

2. What do I value most about our church? What activities or ingredients or ways of life are most important? What are the best features of our church?

3. Building on these experiences and strengths, what are three possibilities I prayerfully imagine that God might desire for the future of our church?



Journey Wall

A Journey Wall creates a timeline in the fellowship hall using butcher paper. For Thrive Project purposes, a Journey Wall can help a congregation look back (at their identity) to look forward (to where God might be leading).

At a fellowship event (or series of events), ask congregants to share their stories related to the Great Ends:

- The approximate time (by decade or year) when they *personally* experienced God’s love and grace through a church whose ministry was guided by the Great Ends. (This can be at the same or a different church.)
- The approximate time (by decade or year) when the church *as a faith community* experienced spiritual insight, deepening, or blessing through one of the Great Ends. (This is, of necessity, an exercise that will be dominated by longer-term members and will help others to hear the congregational story of God’s love and grace through the decades.)
- What *themes* emerge from the narrative told in this journey wall? What core values emerge?
- What *chapters* are written by this narrative? How do the different church epochs differ from one another?

“Lord, Deepen Our Wonder” Prayer Concerts

In “Lord, Deepen Our Wonder” prayer concerts, the church hosts dedicated times of prayer on each of the seven themes, specifically targeted toward:

- *Repentance*: Lord, how have we failed to live with courageous and generous faith?
- *Discernment*: Lord, what would you have us to know, to do, or to become?
- *Wonder*: Lord, show us your Providence and provision beyond our ability!
- By organizing “prayer triads” or “prayer quads” of people willing to pray together for the church in connection to the Great Ends.
- As part of each week’s worship service—it could be *both* a joy *and* a concern!

A prayer concert is easy to organize and helps focus the spiritual *attention* and spiritual *intention* of the congregation. Possibilities include:

- All small groups and committees throughout the church
- As a Sunday morning gathering

