

IDEAS FOR HOW A CONGREGATION MIGHT BEGIN TO DISCERN ITS MINISTRY TO ITS NEIGHBORS

*When asked if they would be willing to help their neighbors, most congregations will say, "yes!"
But when a congregation doesn't know its neighbors, it can't know its neighbors' needs.
When relationships are intact, then needs, desires, hopes and dreams
can become clear and can be shared.*

OUR SHARED LAND

- Discuss: what is the story of the land and building your congregation occupies?
 - Whose labor and sacrifices made it available to the congregation today?
 - Who stewarded the land on which your church sits before it was a church?
 - What are the blessings of the space you are stewarding? What are the challenges?
 - Who might your congregation be protecting your building/property for? Who might you be protecting it from?
 - What are the current assets of the building/property?

OUR SHARED NEIGHBORHOOD

- Do: gather a group of people from your church and take a walk around your church's neighborhood. Take note of what is there:
 - Who lives there? Who works there? Who plays there?
 - What do you notice that surprises you?
 - Who and what used to be there?
 - What has changed in the time you've been attending?
- Do: Get to know your neighbors
 - What do they know or think of your church (listen without judgment)?
 - Do they have an accurate understanding of what you are about?
 - What does your congregation **wish** people would say about your church?
- Are there issues that need to be resolved?

Be specific and try to notice anew on your walk rather than relying on your memories or your favored narrative about your neighborhood.

- Do: come back together as a group to share what you noticed and pray for your neighborhood, asking God to bless and protect it and asking God to reveal God's own dream and vision for the space your church and neighbors share.

OUR SHARED DREAMS

- Discuss:
 - What is the congregation's dream of how the space could be used?
 - What is God's dream?
 - Look at existing ministries (including Sunday worship) and brainstorm small ways to move beyond "us" and "them."
 - How does a congregation discern either way?

Reflect: How might your church/land be the answer to someone's dreams? What are the dreams around you?

- Look for common themes of dreams/ hopes/ problems to solve.
- How might your building/ land be a resource?
- Look for inspiration at how other congregations have worked to help their neighbors
- Meet with community partners, such as Leaven Land & Housing Coalition.
- Consult with the Diocesan Redevelopment Team.

Pray!

Dear God, in whom we find our home, you are our shelter and our strength. For those who have no earthly shelter, we pray for nothing less than safe spaces to call home. For those who have earthly shelter, we pray for the grace to see Christ in every person. Forgive us; we live in a land of abundance, yet basic needs are out of reach for many. Cultivate in us defiant hope that, even in this time and in this place, your power working in us can do more than we can ask or imagine. We ask in the name of Jesus, the Son of Man, who had no place to lay his head.

Amen.

Among the many places where Jesus calls us to action is Matthew 25:35-40:

For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked, and you clothed me, I was sick, and you visited me, I was in prison, and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me.'

Trust: That when minds and hearts are open to God's leading, God will lead.

Resources

Review our ECWO webpage and The Episcopal Church (<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/>), including our shared commitments to social justice; our partnership with the Poor People's Campaign; our asset-based community development – moving from a mentality of scarcity to one of abundance;