

**A Spiritual Strategic Journey
With Grace United Methodist Church**

Dialogue and Prayer Triplet Guide

100 Days of Discernment

Building relationships with one another
Discerning God's vision
Discovering new adventures
Preparing to develop our future story of ministry

"I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" Isaiah 43:19

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*[For additional information consult the book by George Bullard entitled **Pursuing the Full Kingdom
Potential of Your Congregation.**]*

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Through God's power, building a community committed to Christ that lives out the Great Commandment and fulfills the Great Commission.

The perennial question is asked the moment our feet hit the doorstep. Children ask it when leaving the house in tow, and church members ask it when embarking on a new initiative. The answer for our congregation is that **we are going where God sends us**. That's not satisfactory, of course. We want clearer answers. It's like a parent telling a child, "We're going where I take you, and that's all you need to know." But it isn't all we need to know, not really. We want to know the destination. Where is God sending us?

The early Christians struggled with the same question. They asked Jesus where they were going and he answered them, "I am the way." But the answer wasn't enough. They didn't just want to know *how to get there*; they wanted to know *where they were going*. We too question Jesus, asking for guidance, direction, and a plan of action. This questioning is prayer. And the initial answer will be the same. Jesus is the way. If we love the way Jesus loved, live the way he lived, serve the way he served, we will remain on the way God is sending us.

But the nagging question remains: on the way where? Simply saying "the kingdom of God" isn't enough. The kingdom of God seems far distant from the world we live in, and we want answers for the here and now.

Two statements by Jesus may give us a sense of direction. The first, "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21, *NIV*). Sometimes we think of the kingdom as something located in the future. Jesus suggests that the promises of God are present with us *now*.

The second statement: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21, *NLT*). Because we have been given God's promises, we are sent to dialogue them. We must recover an understanding of the church not so much as a group that is to be gathered, but as a people who have been scattered. We are the ones who have been sent.

God is sending us on a *spiritual* strategic journey to proclaim the good news of the coming kingdom. This means our strategy must be more than programs and three-year goals. Our church's mission must arise directly from our church's spiritual life.

Prayer enables us to discern our mission. When rooted in contemplation, the fruits of Christian action grow healthy and strong. Immersed in prayer, we are able to live, love and serve with Jesus wherever God sends us.

Whenever God demands great things of the faithful, God calls them first to pray. Prayer connects us with the abundant life available in Jesus. Prayer connects us with each other. When we gather in a small prayer group and pray aloud for one another, we realize true community by listening together for God's voice.

Through prayer we are able to dialogue our stories of faith and life, frustration and sadness, hope and possibility. By sharing our experiences of life and prayer, our vision of Jesus will be clearer, as will our understanding of where God is sending us and what God expects of us here.

Your Dialogue and Prayer Triplet is a covenant group. In it you are committing:

- to pray for each other and the church on a regular basis;
- to meet together at your agreed upon times;
- to continue with your group throughout the entire 100 days;
- to be a safe prayer companion and to keep your private sharing confidential;
- to have an open mind as you listen for God's voice and watch for God's leading.

Are we there yet? No. Not completely. But in Jesus the kingdom is already here. Will we know everything we need to know about our calling at the end of these 100 days? No. But by the end of our time together, we will have a clearer sense of God's vision for our congregation. The elements of our future story will begin to emerge, and they will shape who we become and where we will go. May it be so. Amen.

100 DAYS DIALOGUE AND PRAYER COVENANT

MY TRIPLET (Name, Telephone Number, and E-mail Address)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

OUR COVENANT

Our Dialogue and Prayer Triplet goals are:

- ☐ To gather 10 times for 60 to 100 minutes over the course of 100 days.
- ☐ To faithfully attend each triplet gathering.
- ☐ To study and dialogue about the selected scripture.
- ☐ To study and dialogue about the congregational issues.
- ☐ To imagine what the positive full kingdom potential future of our congregation would be if we effectively live into God's vision for us.
- ☐ To brainstorm about changes we may need to make in the life and ministry of our congregation to innovatively live into God's future.
- ☐ To pray daily for one another, the other triplets, our congregation, our pastor/staff, and our lay leaders. To pray for clarity regarding God's call to us as individuals and to our congregation as we discern the next steps for our spiritual strategic journey.
- ☐ Other: _____

Ground Rules [such as confidentiality]: _____

I will try, with God's help, to be a regular, faithful, involved, caring member of this Dialogue and Prayer Triplet.

Signed _____ Date _____

Signed _____ Date _____

Signed _____ Date _____

10 CONGREGATIONAL ISSUES FOR DIALOGUE AND PRAYER

- 1. Visionary Leadership:** Our congregation has a captivating and passionate sense of our identity involving the eternal mission of God, and the everlasting purpose of our congregation [*who we are*], our enduring core values [*what we believe or highly value*], our empowering vision [*where we are headed*], and our spiritual and strategic journey as a congregation [*how we are getting there*]. Our leadership is clearly captivated by God's vision for the future of our congregation.
- 2. Relationship Experiences:** Our congregation is doing well at inviting people to a Christ-centered faith journey, and at helping people who are connecting with our congregation to be on an intentional and maturing faith journey. Among the characteristics of the faith journey of our people is that through our congregation they are experiencing spiritual formation, the development of Christian leadership practices, and active involvement in congregational ministry roles and missional engagement beyond the congregation.
- 3. Programmatic Emphases:** Our congregation has high quality programs, ministries, and activities which meet the real needs of real people in real time. In terms of our Wesleyan heritage, the programs we have are a "means of God's grace" that make God's grace visible in the world. We are well known throughout our congregation, and our geographic community, or among the target or affinity groups we serve, for our outstanding programmatic emphases. Our programs, ministries, and activities are growing in numerical vitality. Our programs meet the spiritual, social, and emotional needs of people.
- 4. Accountable Management:** Our congregation has excellent, flexible management systems that are accountable to God's vision for the church. The practices for addressing the need for appointed clergy and employed personnel, plus elected and volunteer leadership are healthy and creative. Generosity and stewardship efforts are inspiring, and the accounting for financial resources is trustworthy. Our governance and decision-making systems are effective, plus open and responsive to congregational input. Our facilities and grounds are suitable for our needs and kept in good repair.
- 5. Community Engagement:** Our congregation is deeply connected with our community context. We have clearly defined our community geographically and/or according to our target or affinity groups. We know to whom God is sending us based on God's vision for us and our spiritual gifts, skills, and cultural preferences. We are effective in engaging the needs of our community, and in inviting people to explore and enter a Christ-centered faith journey through the ministry of our congregation.

6. **People of Pastoral Leadership:** Our pastors [plus any pastoral/program staff] have a genuine commitment to leading our congregation on a spiritual and strategic journey towards the fulfillment of God's vision and the reaching of our full Kingdom potential. Our pastors [plus any pastoral/program staff] are highly respected as our staff leaders, and our congregation will proactively support the pastors/staff as initiating leaders as they cast God's vision for increased vitality and vibrancy as a congregation.
7. **People of Passion:** We have many people in our congregation who have positive, spiritual passion about the future of our congregation toward which God is leading us. They have a genuine commitment to help our pastoral leadership move our congregation along a spiritual and strategic journey towards the fulfillment of God's vision and the reaching of our full Kingdom potential. These people represent at least seven people or seven percent—whichever is greater—of the average number of adults present on a typical Sunday/weekend for worship.
8. **People of Position:** The elected or appointed lay leaders in our congregation have a positive commitment to transition and change that may lead to transformation and the achievement of our full Kingdom potential. They celebrate the past of our congregation, honor the present, and are willing to empower the future. They are competent and committed leaders who are not interested in controlling the future of our congregation, but want a vital and vibrant future. Our congregation highly respects them, and will proactively support them as part of our overall leadership.
9. **Numerical Vitality:** We know congregational vitality is much more than numerical vitality. Yet, the number of people connected with our congregation and the depth of their participation is a key sign of vitality. Our trend over the past five to ten years is that we have seen an increase of at least 10 to 15 percent in the people attending, and they are connecting deeply, and involved in and through our congregation in Christ-centered ministry and missional engagement.
10. **Spiritual and Emotional Maturity:** Our congregation is a healthy Christ-centered community characterized by spiritual and emotional maturity. We are a people of the unconditional love of God. This allows us to handle with obvious maturity any issues which might disrupt the sense of fellowship and unity, and perhaps produce unhealthy conflict. Because of our maturity depth we are able to build a qualitative sense of traveling together on a spiritual and strategic journey. When diverse viewpoints produce disagreements we handle them in ways which reflect our spiritual and emotional maturity.

DIALOGUE AND PRAYER GATHERING

GENERAL FORMAT GUIDELINES

[Each Triplet will work out its own pattern. This is simply a suggested beginning point.]

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

Begin by sharing what has happened in the last week and how God has been active in it.

Perhaps light a candle to remind everyone of Christ's continued presence when two or three (in this case three) are gathered. You might begin by singing a chorus or hymn together, or if you don't want to sing, then to read the text of a song or poem about prayer. Appoint a different person each week to offer a gathering prayer of their own, or lead you together in the Lord's Prayer or one of the suggested prayers in this booklet.

SCRIPTURE

13-15 minutes

This guide will offer scripture passages for your group to consider. Sample questions for dialogue follow.

DIALOGUE

20-40 minutes

Spend time developing your Christian relationship with each other. Go beyond the superficial and dialogue your dreams and concerns. Each week this guide will suggest topics for discussion drawn from the "Congregational Issues for a Generative Dialogue for a Spiritual Strategic Journey" inventory. These conversation starters should help generate healthy dialogue and stimulate creative thinking. *Record some of your insights in the space provided in this guide.*

PRAYER

15-30 minutes

Consider keeping a list of prayer concerns. Include personal requests as well as wishes for our congregation. Include thanksgiving for blessings and celebrations of answered prayer. Pray out loud. Take turns, then take turns again. Allow the Spirit to pray in you. Rest in the silences. Take your time.

If praying aloud is new to you, consider using the **A-C-T-S** format. You can write out your prayers and share them in your Triplet or try out praying sentence prayers aloud.

- Begin with **ADORATION** praising God for who God is
- Move to **CONFESSION**, acknowledging failures and our selfish willfulness
- Offer **THANKS** for what God has done in your life and in the life of the church
- Conclude with **SUPPLICATIONS** asking God for the things you need

BENEDICTION

2-5 minutes

Benediction is a time for blessing each other with the grace of God and praying for God's continued presence in each day to come. You might choose a different person to offer the Benediction each time you meet.

TOTAL TIME 60–100 minutes

TELLING OUR STORIES

Optional Orientation or Initial Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

5 minutes

Grant that we may know what we ought to know, to love what we ought to love, to praise what delights you most, to value what is precious in your sight. Amen.

(Thomas á Kempis)

SCRIPTURE

5-10 minutes

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord. (Jeremiah 29:11-14, NRSV)

When your life has seemed pointless and hopeless, how do you feel when you hear that God's plans for you include a "future with hope"? Dialogue what it means to you to search for God with all your heart.

DIALOGUE

5-10 minutes

Sample check-in questions: What was the high point of your week and what was your low? Where did you see God active in your life this week? Tell something about your spiritual journey. What was the place of prayer in your home as a child? How did you first encounter Jesus? How did you come to be part of our congregation? How are you learning to listen for God's voice and discern God's will in your life? Allow each person about 10 minutes.

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 23]

5-10 minutes

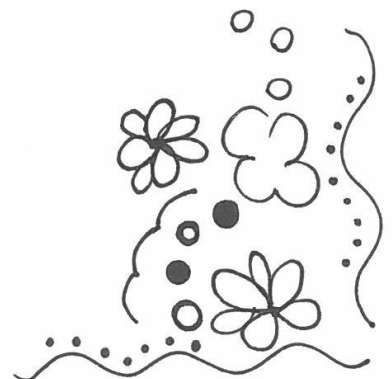
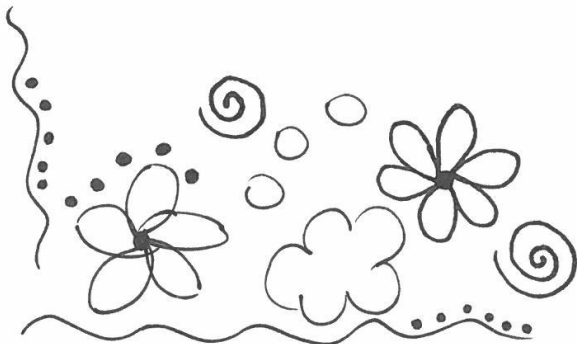
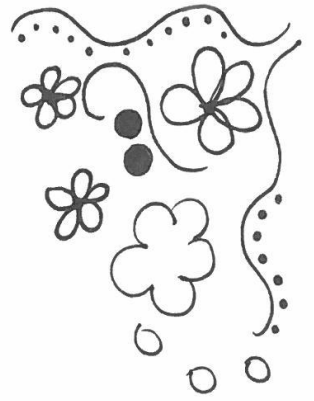
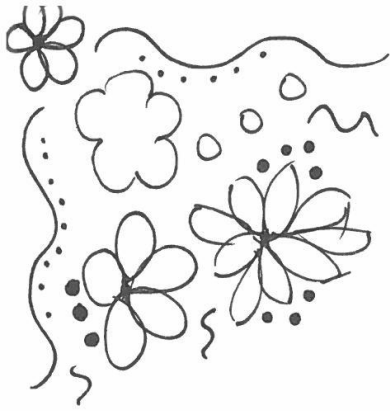
BENEDICTION

2-5 minutes

Total Time: 22-40 minutes

You may choose to use the suggested sessions in order or to rearrange them as you see fit, or to find other ways of dialogue or prayer together using other prayer resources. The following sessions are provided as a guide to assist you in deepening your relationship with each other and with God, and to discuss issues related to God's vision for our congregation as we claim God's future vision. Blank pages framed by creative art by members of Grace Church are located throughout this guide for you to doodle, draw and journal your own insights along the way. Enjoy the Journey!

Journal Insights from this gathering on the following blank page:



VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

First Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened in your life since we last met, and how is God at work in it?

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart; naught be all else to me save that thou art,
Thou my best thought by day or by night, waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.
Be thou my wisdom, O thou my true word; I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;
Thou my redeemer, my love thou hast won, thou in me dwelling and I with thee one.
Great God of heaven, my victory won, may I reach heaven's joy, O bright heaven's sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall, still be my vision, O Ruler of all.
(Irish song, tr. Mary E. Byrne, 1905)

SCRIPTURE

13-15 minutes

Where there is no vision the people perish. (Proverbs 29:18, King James Version)

If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves. (Proverbs 29:18, The Message)

"In the last days it will be," God declares, "that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." (Acts 2:17, NRSV)

How is God "opening your eyes" toward the future? Is there some vision or dream from God that you are being called to help realize? How can you begin this week to live what you see?

DIALOGUE

20-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on "Visionary Leadership" in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. What is your dream or vision for your future? What is your dream or vision for our congregation? What do you think is God's vision for you and for our congregation? When we are the ideal, perfect church, what will we look like? Who will we be? What will we do? Consider things we are already doing well. Consider things we can do better.

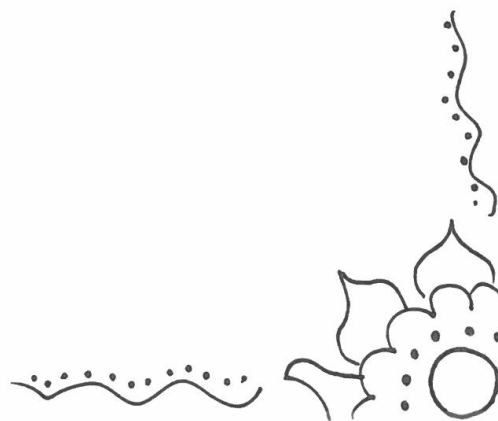
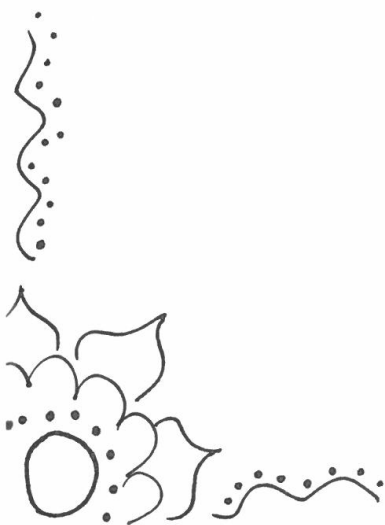
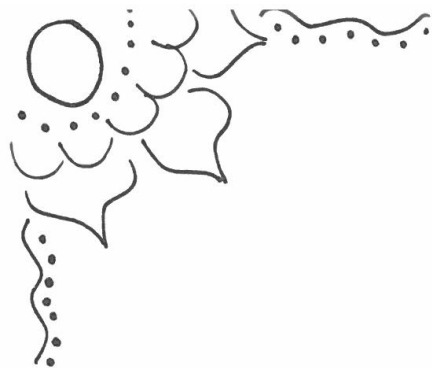
PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 25]

15-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

2-5 minutes

Journal insights from this gathering on the following blank page:



RELATIONSHIP EXPERIENCES

Second Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened since we last met, and how is God at work in it?

They committed themselves to the teachings of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers. Acts 2:42 (The Message)

And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25 (NRSV)

“Communities flounder when accountability and support are not held in tension. Without accountability, there is no discipline. But without support, there is no motivation or encouragement to progress in the Christian life.” Ken Carter, *A Way of Life in the World*

SCRIPTURE

13-15 minutes

Jesus replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment and the second is equally important: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40, NLT)

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up only one body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into Christ’s body by one Spirit, and we have all received the same Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13, NLT)

How are love of self, others and God connected? How do you love with your whole heart? Which part of this commandment requires the most effort for you? Which is easiest? How in the coming week can you demonstrate the love of God in your life in order to build up the body of Christ?

DIALOGUE

32-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on “Relationship Experiences” in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. Describe an important friendship that has been meaningful to you in your life. What made the relationship special? How did you make up after arguments? Talk more about your relationship with God through Jesus Christ. How is your relationship with God different than your relationships with friends? How can we bring more people into relationship with God through our congregation?

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 24]

15-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

2-5 minutes

Journal insights from this gathering on the following blank page:

God is good ~ ALL the time

PROGRAMMATIC EMPHASES

Third Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened since we last met, and how is God at work in it?

O Jesus, wisdom of God, grant me wisdom that I may always think, speak, and do that which is good in thy sight; save me from evil thoughts, words and deeds. Have mercy upon thy creatures and upon me, a manifold sinner, that together with all the church I may do what is just for all thy creatures. Amen.

(A prayer of St. Nerses Schnorhali)

SCRIPTURE

13-15 minutes

But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. Those who spoke Greek complained against those who spoke Hebrew, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers... "Now look around among yourselves, brothers, and select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. We will put them in charge of this business." (Acts 6:1-2a, 3, NLT)

Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service in the church, but it is the same Lord we are serving. There are different ways God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work through all of us. (1 Corinthians 12:4-6, NLT)

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

What general attitudes do you see in the early church as programs are initiated and carried out? Do we have similar attitudes today? What is the purpose of programs/ministries in the church? How do we measure their effectiveness? How do our programs emerge to meet present needs? When a need is met, how does the program respond?

DIALOGUE

20-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on "Programmatic Emphases" in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. What activities or programs of the church that are very important to you, and why? What is one program you could do without? "Something the church did that made a difference in my life was ..." Talk more about your involvement in the ministries of this congregation. What programs do we do well? Which ones could be better? In what ways have you seen lives transformed as a result of the church's programs/ministries?

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 30]

15-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

2-5 minutes

Journal insights from this gathering on the following blank page:



ACCOUNTABLE MANAGEMENT

Fourth Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened since we last met, and how is God at work in it?

I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,
Exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to the pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Thou art mine and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
Let it be ratified in heaven. Amen. (A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition)

SCRIPTURE

13-15 minutes

I have a special concern for you church leaders. I know what it's like to be a leader, in on Christ's sufferings as well as the coming glory. Here's my concern: that you care for God's flock with all the diligence of a shepherd. Not because you have to, but because you want to please God. Not calculating what you can get out of it, but acting spontaneously. Not bossily telling others what to do, but tenderly showing them the way. When God, who is the best shepherd of all, comes out in the open with his rule, he'll see that you've done it right and commend you lavishly. And you who are younger must follow your leaders. But all of you, leaders and followers alike, are to be down to earth with each other, for— God has had it with the proud, But takes delight in just plain people. (1 Peter 5:1-5, The Message)

Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise. Use his words to teach and counsel each other. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus, all the while giving thanks through him to God the Father. (Colossians 3:16-17, NLT)

What is the role of the leaders in the church? Why is the conduct of church leaders so important in challenging times? How do you respond to authority in the church, either as one who wields it or one who submits to it? How do biblical models of leadership challenge today's church?

DIALOGUE

32-40 minutes

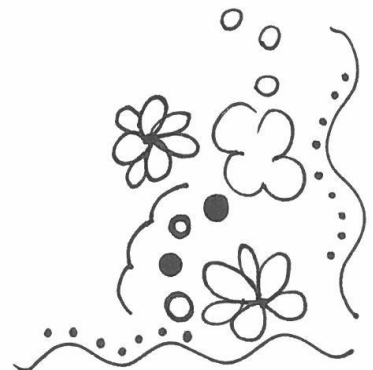
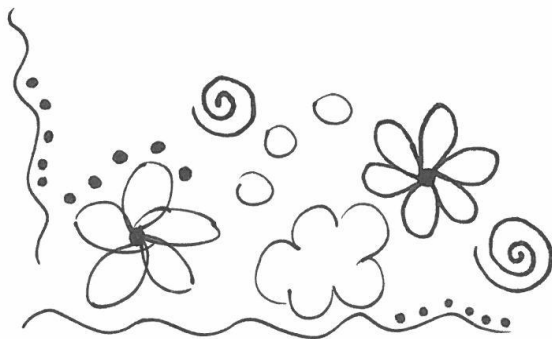
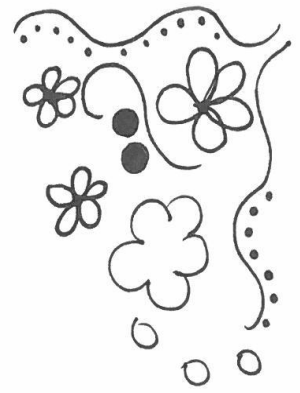
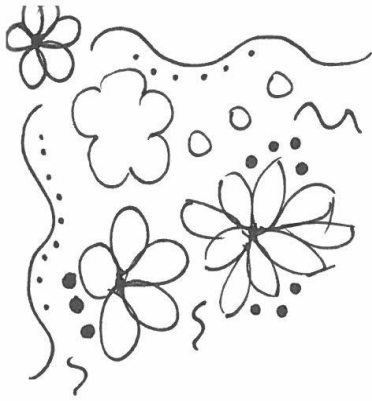
Discuss briefly the statement on "Accountable Management" in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. What do you think is the ideal church structure? Is there one biblical model or several? How do we keep a good balance between Spirit-led flexibility and practical organization? "Something I really like about the way our church does things is..." "If I were in charge, the first thing I would change is..." What are we doing well? What can we do better?

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 95:1-7]

15-30 minutes

BENEDICTION 2-5 minutes

Journal insights from this gathering



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Fifth Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened since we last met, and how is God at work in it?

For your gathering today here are two songs of the church, one from Fred Pratt Green in the UM Hymnal #592 and another from the band Casting Crowns.

“When the Church of Jesus”

When the church of Jesus shuts its outer door,
Lest the roar of traffic drown the voice of prayer;
May our prayers, Lord, make us ten times more
aware that the world we banish is our Christian Care.

If our hearts are lifted where devotion soars
High above this hungry suff’ring world of ours;
Lest our hymns should drug us to forget its needs,
Forge our Christian worship into Christian deeds.

Lest the gifts we offer, money, talents, time,
Serve to salve our conscience, to our secret shame,
Lord, reprove, inspire us by the way you give;
Teach us, dying Savior, how true Christians live.

“If We Are the Body”

It's crowded in worship today as she slips in
trying to fade into the faces
The girls teasing laughter is carrying farther than
they know, farther than they know

But if we are the body
Why aren't His arms reaching?
Why aren't His hands healing?
Why aren't His words teaching?
And if we are the body
Why aren't His feet going?
Why is His love not showing them there is a way?
There is a way, there is a way

A traveler is far away from home, he sheds his
coat and quietly sinks into the back row
The weight of their judgmental glances
Tells him that his chances are better out on the
road

But if we are the body
Why aren't His arms reaching?
Why aren't His hands healing?
Why aren't His words teaching?
And if we are the body
Why aren't His feet going?
Why is His love not showing them there is a way?

Jesus paid much too high a price
For us to pick and choose who should come

And we are the body of Christ
But if we are the body
Why aren't His arms reaching?
Why aren't His hands healing?
Why aren't His words teaching?
And if we are the body
Why aren't His feet going?
Why is His love not showing them there is a way?
Jesus is the way, Jesus is the way
We are His hands, We are His feet
We are His body, Jesus is the way

SCRIPTURE

13-15 minutes

“Even though I am free of the demands and expectations of everyone, I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people: religious, nonreligious, meticulous moralists, loose-living immoralists, the defeated, the demoralized—whoever. I didn’t take on their way of life. I kept my bearings in Christ—but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I’ve become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life. I did all this because of the Message. I didn’t just want to talk about it; I wanted to be in on it!” (1 Corinthians 9:19-23 The Message)

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:14-21, NRSV)

What does it mean to become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people? How can we be church in such a way that those in our community meet Jesus in us? What do you think it means to lead people in our community in the way of salvation? If you have time, google “Scripture Way of Salvation John Wesley.” Try praying Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians for people in your community while walking by their homes/places of business. What insight did you gain from doing this?

DIALOGUE

20-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on “Community Engagement” in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. Who are the kinds of people you most like being with? What kinds of people make you uncomfortable? Who should we be recruiting, ministering to, seeking out for membership in the church? Who should we not be recruiting, ministering to, ...? How relevant are we to our context? How can we do better?

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 100]

15-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

2-5 minutes

Journal insights from this gathering on the following blank page:



PEOPLE OF PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

Sixth Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened since we last met, and how is God at work in it?

Gracious God, give the pastors of your church the grace and power they need to serve you in this ministry, so that you people may be strengthened and your name glorified in all the world. Make them faithful pastors, patient teachers, and wise counselors. Enable them to serve without reproach, to proclaim the gospel of salvation, to administer the Sacraments of the new covenant, to order the life of the Church, and to offer with all your people spiritual sacrifices acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Prayer from the Service of Ordination for Elders, UM Book of Worship)

SCRIPTURE

13-15 minutes

So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing. Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord's work. They work hard among you and warn you against all that is wrong. Think highly of them and give them your wholehearted love because of their work. And remember to live peaceably with each other. (1 Thessalonians 5:11-13, NLT)

Come to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by the people, but he is precious to God who chose him. And now God is building you, as living stones, into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are God's holy priests, who offer the spiritual sacrifices that please him because of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:4-5, NLT)

How well does Paul's description of "those who are your leaders in the Lord's work" fit your understanding of pastoral ministry? How often do you pray for your pastor? Do you esteem pastors (current and previous) highly in love? "Something I can do that will help my pastor is..." "Before our next meeting I will assist my pastor by ..." Do you think of yourself as part of a holy priesthood? What is your pastoral ministry?

DIALOGUE

20-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on "People of Pastoral Leadership" in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. Describe something a pastor did that helped you. Describe a time when a pastor disappointed you. If you could be pastor of the church for one week, how would you spend your time? What "spiritual sacrifices" does your pastor offer that can lead to spiritual change or transformation of the congregation?

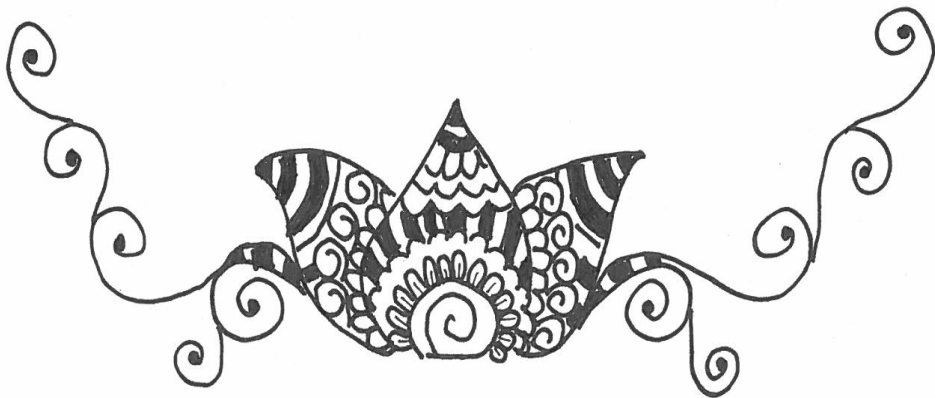
PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 108:1-6]

15-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

2-5 minutes

Journal insights from this gathering on the following blank page:



PEOPLE OF PASSION

Seventh Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened since we last met, and how has God been at work in it?

God be in my head and in my understanding;
God be in my eyes and in my looking;
God be in my mouth and in my speaking;
God be in my heart and in my thinking;
God be at my end and at my departing.
(*Sarum Primer*, 1514)

SCRIPTURE

13-15 minutes

"I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, I will spit you out of my mouth! You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." (Revelation 3:15-17, NLT)

During the forty days after his crucifixion, he appeared to the apostles from time to time and proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. On these occasions he talked to them about the Kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3, NLT)

Passion runs hot and cold. What was the early church passionate about? How would a lukewarm Christian witness? Cold? Hot? What causes you to become passionate about something? Do you want to change your "spiritual thermostat"? What about the church's "spiritual thermostat"? The story of Jesus' suffering and death is often called the "passion narrative" because suffering and passion are related. Are you willing to suffer for your passions?

DIALOGUE

20-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on "People of Passion" in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. Name some of the things at church you feel strongly about and why. What are some things you think Jesus felt strongly about? Do you think you and Jesus are passionate about the same sorts of things? What is your sense of urgency for change and transition at our congregation?

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 111]

15-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

2-5 minutes

Journal insights from this gathering on the following blank page:



PEOPLE OF POSITION

Eighth Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened since we last met, and how is God active in it?

The Bible teaches that each believer has been gifted by God with a particular spiritual ability that God uses to build up and equip the church for its ministry. We celebrate the unique blend of gifts in this congregation and recognize that God works through a variety of persons without respect to race, gender, cultural background, etc.

“Almighty God, in every age you have called out men and women to be your faithful servants. We believe you have now called us to join that great company who seek to follow you. Grant unto us today and always a clear vision of your call and strength to fulfill the ministry assigned to us. We pray in the name of Christ. Amen.” (*A Guide to Prayer*, p. 65)

SCRIPTURE

13-15 minutes

Afterward Jesus went up on a mountain and called the ones he wanted to go with him. And they came to him. Then he selected twelve of them to be his regular companions, calling them apostles. He sent them out to preach, and he gave them authority to cast out demons. (Mark 3:13-15, NLT)

Does Jesus expect too much of the apostles? Of us? Has Jesus asked you to go anywhere or do anything? How did you respond? Is Jesus asking our leaders to go anywhere or do anything right now? Is he asking you? What will you do or where will you go for Jesus before we meet again?

DIALOGUE

20-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on “People of Position” in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. Which would you rather be a leader or a follower? In our church, do we have the right number of leaders and followers? Is our leadership circle open or closed? What can you do to empower our leadership to achieve the change and transformation God is calling forth from the congregation? What actions or attitudes might derail our leadership from this calling?

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 117]

15-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

2-5 minutes

Journal insights from this gathering on the following blank page:

God is good ~ ALL the time

NUMERICAL VITALITY

Ninth Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened since we last met, and how is God active in it?

"I am not afraid that the people called Methodist should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out." John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Methodism* 1786

"Vigorous vitality is the hope and dream of God for every church in every place. There are conditions under which this kind of vitality is not only possible but a reality. God has done God's part. God has given us all that we need for our local churches to be vital: The Holy Spirit with his gifts and fruits, and ordinary people to be instruments of community and world transformation." Jorge Acevedo, *Vital: Churches Changing Communities and the World*

SCRIPTURE

13-15 minutes

Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you." (Matthew 28:18-20, NLT)

Peter replied, "Each of you must turn from your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is to you and to your children, and even to the Gentiles—all who have been called by the Lord our God." Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this generation that has gone astray!" Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church—about three thousand in all. (Acts 2:38-41, NLT)

For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26-28, NRSV)

DIALOGUE

20-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on "Numerical Vitality" in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. What are people looking for in a church? What should the church be looking for in people? How easy is it for a new person to find our church? Do you think they feel welcome? Do your friends know you are Christian and that you attend this church? Do you know anyone who does not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 121]

15-30 minutes

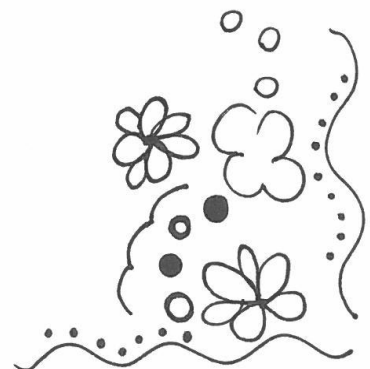
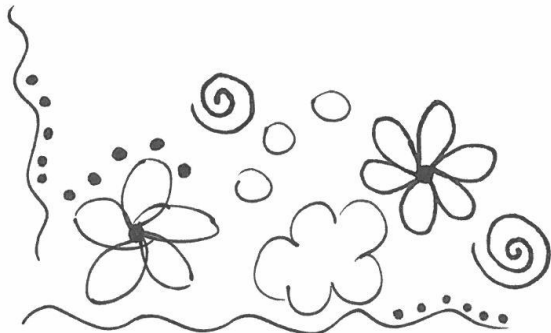
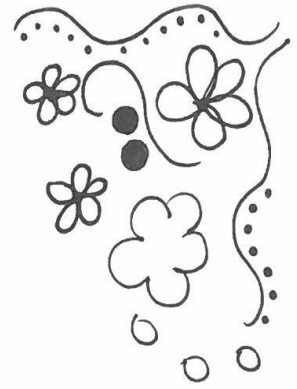
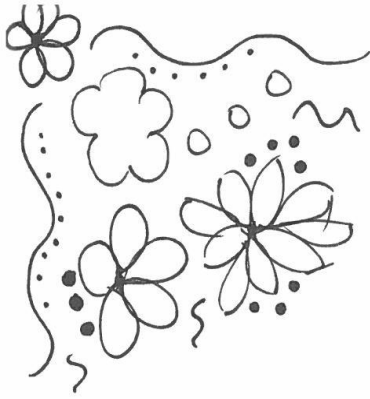
Merciful God, you call us by name and promise to each of us your constant love. Watch over us, your servants. Deepen our understanding of the Gospel, strengthen our commitment to follow the way of Christ, and keep us in the faith and communion of your church. Increase our compassion for others, send us into the world in witness to your love, and bring us to the fullness of your peace and glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

BENEDICTION

2-5 minutes

I

Journal insights from this gathering



SPIRITUAL AND EMOTIONAL MATURITY

Tenth Gathering

GATHERING, WELCOMING AND CENTERING

10 minutes

What has happened since we last met, and how is God active in it?

Hope of the world, O Christ of great compassion:

Speak to our fearful hearts by conflict rent;

Save us, your people, from consuming passion,

Who by our own false hopes and aims are spent. (Georgia Harkness, 1954)

SCRIPTURE

13-15 minutes

Stop being bitter and angry and mad at others. Don't yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude. Instead, be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ. Do as God does. After all, you are his dear children. Let love be your guide. Christ loved us and offered his life for us as a sacrifice that pleases God. (Ephesians 4:31-5:2, CEV)

"If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him—work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you've made a friend. If he won't listen, take one or two others along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again. If he still won't listen, tell the church. If he won't listen to the church, you'll have to start over from scratch, confront him with the need for repentance, and offer again God's forgiving love. Take this most seriously: A yes on earth is yes in heaven; a no on earth is no in heaven. What you say to one another is eternal. I mean this. When two of you get together on anything at all on earth and make a prayer of it, my Father in heaven goes into action. And when two or three of you are together because of me, you can be sure that I'll be there." (Matthew 18:15-20, The Message)

"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation." (2Corinthians 5:17-18, NRSV)

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:5-8 NRSV)

What conflict do you think the early church was struggling with? In what way do you think being "imitators of God," "having the mind of Christ" enables us to work through conflict? Has a member of the church ever sinned against you and you then followed this model? What happened?

DIALOGUE

20-40 minutes

Discuss briefly the statement on "Spiritual and Emotional Maturity" in the *Congregational Issues for Generative Dialogue*. Is it okay for Christians to disagree? Describe a time when someone disagreed with you in a way that did not tear you down. Were you ever part of a "church fight" where Christ was glorified? How? Do you think God keeps a forgiveness score? Is there someone God is calling you to forgive? How will you answer God's call?

PRAYER [Prayer Psalm – Psalm 134]

15-30 minutes

BENEDICTION

2-5 minutes

Journal insights from this gathering



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*This page is for you to record any personal or Triplet prayer requests.
[Keep it for your personal and Triplet use.]*

What are Three Positive Actions You Personally Plan to Take to Contribute to the Future Vitality of Our Congregation as a Result of Your Participation in this Dialogue and Prayer Triplet?

1	
2	
3	

*This page is for your personal reflection and, if you desire, sharing with your Triplet.
[Keep it for your personal use.]*

What are the Top Five to Seven Insights or Discernments About God's Future for Our Congregation Your Triplet Would Like to Share?

1	
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To be completed by the Triplet and turned in at the end of the 10 sessions.