

NEIGHBORHOOD CHURCH

*Transforming Your Congregation
into a Powerhouse for Mission*

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A STUDY GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

There are a variety of ways to study this book in a group setting. Choose the one that best meets your group's needs.

- Small groups may wish to simply read the book and pick questions at the end of each chapter. You can close each session with the prayer provided or one of your own.
- Groups with Spanish-speaking members may wish to download the free resource “Resumen en español de *Neighborhood Church: Transforming Your Congregation into a Powerhouse for Mission*,” which provides summaries and translated questions for each chapter. It may be found at www.pcusasstore.com/NeighborhoodChurch. You may wish to use some of the activities provided in this study guide as well.
- Two or more churches may wish to use this book and study guide as a way to discuss common mission possibilities in the neighborhood where they reside. They can study either together or separately and then hold a group conversation about what was learned and ways to partner in common ministry.

This study guide is designed for five forty-five-minute sessions. Participants should purchase the book and read the chapter(s) to be discussed before the group meets. Leaders and participants do not have to read the entire book before beginning this study. If you wish to have fewer sessions, combine chapters and activities from each session or focus on those chapters that might be most useful for your church.

Session 1: Introduction and Chapter 1

Session 2: Chapter 2

Session 3: Chapter 3

Session 4: Chapter 4

Session 5: Chapter 5 and Conclusion

Session 1

INTRODUCTION AND CHAPTER 1: COMMUNAL CONVERSION

CHAPTER/SESSION THEME

When our churches are coming alive, we turn away from scarcity to abundance, away from ourselves and toward our neighbors. We see that God is already at work within us and around us. We realize that the abundance we need is already present, and that our neighbors have lessons to teach us that we never imagined. (p. 120)

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

- Ask participants to purchase the book and read the introduction and chapter 1 before meeting if possible. If this is not possible, you will need to be prepared to provide summaries of the various sections discussed.
- Books may be purchased at a group discount at www.pcusastore.com. Allow time for delivery.
- Arrange the meeting space in a way that invites participation. It is important that everyone can see one another and hear what is said.
- Consider providing refreshments each session, especially if meeting at a time when some may be hungry.
- Before the session begins, write the following on the board so that all can see: *Thy kingdom come, they will be done, on (name of your neighborhood) as it is in heaven*. If your church uses different language for *Thy kingdom*, adapt accordingly.
- Have copies of your church's mission statement available, or know what it is for activity 6, below.
- Prepare to give a brief summary of pages 9–10 for activity 4, below.
- Gather needed supplies:
 - Books
 - Paper and pens
 - Colored pencils for Opening activity (optional)
 - Board and marker

OPENING (15 MINUTES)

1. Prayer

Pray this prayer or one of your choosing:

*Almighty God,
we thank you for the gifts of healthy minds
that enable us to grasp ideas;
the company of others
who teach us, console us,
and struggle through life with us;
and your Holy Spirit,
who moves through us and guides us.
Open our hearts and minds as we begin this conversation,
remembering that you are the giver of all knowledge and wisdom.
Amen.*

2. Welcome and Introductions

If participants do not know each other, consider spending a few minutes having people introduce themselves.

3. Your Church, Then and Now

Distribute pens and paper and ask people to draw an image that represents how your church and surrounding neighborhood have changed since its beginning. For example, they can draw an original image of the church and neighborhood when it was founded. Then they can show how one or the other has changed. If they prefer, they can just write notes about these changes. If people don't know much about the original church, invite them to draw the church and community now.

After a few minutes, invite volunteers to share their images. This will give the chance for people who have been around for a long time to describe how things used to be. However, don't spend too much time telling stories of the past unless you have more than an hour. If this will be a problem, you may wish to invite a few people to prepare a brief report before the session.

EXPLORING (20 MINUTES)

4. Communal Conversion

Summarize pages 9 and 10 about communal conversion. Ask:

- Has this church had a communal conversion? If yes, describe it. If no, describe what one might look like.
- How might you illustrate the relationship between the current neighborhood and your church?

5. Abundant Gifts

Remind participants that the authors describe how, during times of stress, congregations often focus on what they *don't* have instead of what they *do* offer. (You might choose to read the first two paragraphs of the section "Conversion from Scarcity to Abundance" on pp. 10–11.)

Invite participants to call out gifts your church has. Write them on the board. Page 17 offers some ideas for types of gifts, such as space, activities, gifts of members, etc. Encourage people to also list any gifts the community gives to the church. Then ask: Who are encouragers in your community who model abundant optimism?

6. Abundant Mission Statement

Read aloud your church's mission statement and ask how it reflects an attitude of plenty. Read the "Who We Are" list from Broadway United Methodist Church on pages 23–24. Discuss how your mission statement compares.

RESPONDING (5 MINUTES)

7. Thy Kingdom Come

Call attention to the statement you wrote on the board before the session began. Invite participants to call out qualities of heaven that might be seen in your church and neighborhood. Discuss ways you would like to see more signs of heaven in your church and neighborhood.

CLOSING (5 MINUTES)

8. Preparing for the Next Session

Remind participants to read chapter 2 before the next session.

9. Closing Prayer

Invite a participant to read the prayer on page 30.

Session 2

CHAPTER 2: THE DNA OF LISTENING

CHAPTER/SESSION THEME

Listening to God and to others is the foundation of incarnational mission. Only by taking the time to hear each other's stories—beginning in our pews, then fanning out to the community around us—will we clear the way for God to do something new and exciting. (p. 121)

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

- Take a few minutes to reflect on the first session. How was participation? Was there enough time to do what you wanted to do? What, if anything, can you do to improve the group's experience?
- Pray for participants, your church community, and people in the neighborhood, that God might use this time of study to strengthen God's mission in your entire community.
- The opening activity is a chance for participants to experience both actively listening to another person and telling a story to someone who is actively listening to them. Review the options and add any others you think might work for your group.
- Read through the activities in this session and adjust them according to your context.
- Gather needed supplies:
 - Books
 - A timer for storytelling activity 3
 - Board and marker (optional)

OPENING (15 MINUTES)

1. Prayer

Welcome participants as they arrive. Introduce any newcomers. Pray this prayer or one of your choosing:

*Eternal God,
thank you for the opportunity
to gather and consider
your mission in this place.
Open our hearts and minds
to hear your word for us today.*

*May your Holy Spirit flow through our conversation
and move us to where we need to be.
In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.*

2. Introduction to the Session Theme

Invite volunteers to briefly summarize what was discussed last session. Introduce the theme for today, either in your own words or by reading the session theme above.

3. Storytelling

Have people turn to the person next to them and form pairs. You will have time for only two people to talk. If there is an odd number, participate yourself. Tell the group that they will have only ten minutes for this activity. Each person will have just five minutes to talk. You will tell them when it is time to switch.

Each person is to tell a story to the other person about one of the following topics:

- an encounter with a person this past week that is on their mind
- a problem they are having
- a favorite vacation they have had
- one of their favorite childhood memories
- a story about someone in their family

Invite the pairs to pick someone to talk first and begin. After five minutes, have them switch roles. When they are finished, remind them that this session is about listening to the community and one another. Ask how it feels to be heard. Invite a few responses.

EXPLORING (20 MINUTES)

4. The Importance of Listening

Have someone read the long quote on page 35 that begins “We all feel it. . . .” Invite a brief reflection.

Now have someone read the indented quote on page 33 by Krin. Discuss the following:

- What do we not hear by refusing to allow a pause?
- Think back on the activity where you told a story to your neighbor. What else might you have said if there were a pause?
- How do we listen to our neighborhood? What might we hear if we paused?

5. Case Studies

Form two groups, and have each review one of the case studies on pages 40 and 44. (If you prefer to remain as one group, just review the first case study, which begins on p. 40.) After a few minutes, invite each group to mention one or two things they found relevant for your context.

RESPONDING (5 MINUTES)

6. Listening Challenge

Read question 4 on page 48. Spend a few minutes discussing it. Then challenge everyone to listen this week to one person, hopefully from the neighborhood.

CLOSING (5 MINUTES)

7. Preparing for the Next Session

Remind participants to read chapter 3 before the next session.

8. Closing prayer

Invite a volunteer to read the prayer on page 49.

Session 3

CHAPTER 3: TRANSFORMING PARTNERSHIP

CHAPTER/SESSION THEME

Every partnership should be a nexus of transformation in our lives. Through listening and humility, we discover that we have as much to receive as to give. Partnership requires deep attention to relationship building, but the time we spend will pay temporal and eternal dividends. (p. 121)

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

- Spend a few minutes evaluating how the last session went. Are people enjoying the study? Are there common frustrations? Consider talking with one or two participants during the week and getting their feedback. Pray that this study continues to influence the mission of your church and the lives of its members and community.
- Prepare two lists, either on a board or on pieces of newsprint. One list should consist of the five essential missional attitudes on page 52, and the other should consist of the five transformational partnership practices on pages 60–63. Post them before the session begins.
- Gather needed supplies:
 - Books
 - Board or newsprint and marker

OPENING (10 MINUTES)

1. Prayer

Welcome participants as they arrive. Pray this prayer or one of your choosing:

*God who creates, saves, and sustains: Holy Three,
be above us, below us, before us, and behind us.
Surrounded by your love, let us experience you anew.
Open our eyes to your presence,
heal us with your mercy,
and guide us with your Spirit.
Amen.*

2. Introduction to the Session Theme

Invite volunteers to briefly summarize what was discussed last session. Introduce the theme for today, either in your own words or by reading the session theme above.

3. The Importance of Relationship in Partnership

Write the word *relationships* as a header on the board. Invite the group to list types of relationships they have that are not family centered—for example, doctor/patient, mechanic/car owner, etc. After you have four or five, ask: How does our relationship work better if we are friends? People will probably answer that they get better service and can work out problems more easily if they are friends with others. Tell them that is the point of this chapter. We can best do mission together with others when we have a good relationship with them.

EXPLORING (25 MINUTES)

4. Five Attitudes

Point to the five attitudes posted before the session, which are found on page 52. Discuss briefly. Then form two groups and assign each group one of the case studies found on page 52 (Charles and Melissa Johnson) and page 54 (Rev. Leslie Vogel). If your group is small, select just one of the case studies. After a few minutes reviewing them, discuss how the five attitudes are exemplified in the story.

5. Five Practices

Now call attention to the five transformational partnership practices posted before the session and found on pages 60–63. Read them as a group and discuss briefly.

Have the same two groups each review one of the case studies found on pages 64 and 67. Briefly discuss how the practices are observed in each of the case studies. Ask: In this context, what can we learn from the five attitudes and practices?

RESPONDING (5 MINUTES)

6. Serve, Don't Possess

Have participants turn to page 60 and invite a volunteer to read the indented paragraph where Rob tells of his encounter with Pablo Richard. Ask: How can we better serve the people of God?

CLOSING

7. Preparing for the Next Session

Remind participants to read chapter 4 before the next session.

8. Prayer

Invite a volunteer to read the prayer on page 70.

Session 4

CHAPTER 4: INTEGRATING OUR SPACE

CHAPTER/SESSION THEME

We can share our space, but it is far more powerful to integrate it. This means that every partner under our roof understands and embraces a vision of mutual investment in one another's purposes. We are better together, and the more we integrate our common mission, the more we experience spiritual synergy. (121)

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

- This session assumes that groups besides your members use your building. If that is not the case, focus on how your space might be used by others.
- Be prepared for the opening activity. Know which groups use the church facility in case people in your group do not know all of them. Also, find out what, if any, criteria are used to allow groups to use the building. If there is a contract template, obtain a sample copy, or read it and be prepared to summarize it for the group.
- In Exploring, the group is encouraged to take a tour of your building. If this is not practical, prepare to mentally walk them through the building and discuss the questions. Consider taking a physical tour yourself before the session to reacquaint yourself with the outside and inside space.
- Gather needed supplies:
 - Books
 - Board and marker

OPENING (15 MINUTES)

1. Prayer

Welcome participants as they arrive. Pray this prayer or one of your choosing:

*Merciful God,
open our hearts as we gather today.
May our lips speak of your love for all people.
May our actions demonstrate our faith in you.
Amen.*

2. Introduction to the Session Theme

Invite volunteers to briefly summarize what was discussed last session. Introduce the theme for today, either in your own words or by reading the session theme above.

3. How Your Space Is Shared

Make a heading on the board that says “Groups That Use the Church” and invite people to call out the groups that use the church building and that are not members of the church. Even if a few members participate in these groups, if they are not expressly part of the worship life of the congregation, list them.

Ask the group what criteria is used by your church leadership to allow groups to use the building. Add what you learned about this before the session, regarding criteria and contract information, to fill in missing information.

Draw a horizontal line on the board. On the left end, write “Renters,” and on the right end, write “Partners.” Invite the group to decide where on the continuum they would place each of the groups that use the church building.

EXPLORING (20 MINUTES)

4. Integrated Space

Read the first two paragraphs on page 74 and summarize the two examples or read those descriptions as well (the third and fourth paragraphs). Ask: Do we “make decisions based on *an antiquated sense of ownership* or upon *a resurrected sense of stewardship?*” (p. 75)

5. Building Tour

Have participants pretend that they are visitors for the first time to your building and that they are not necessarily Christian. Remind them that visitors who do not speak English might visit your neighborhood, especially if it includes many immigrants. If there is time and all participants are able bodied and willing, do this tour physically.

Begin outside, and take note of signage where people enter. Do they know where to enter? Walk around outside and inside your building and imagine what visitors might think. Depending on your time, take as long as possible, even looking at a bulletin (if you provide them during worship). How do nonmembers navigate worship? How welcome do they feel? Read some of the questions on the second full paragraph on page 79.

6. Creating a Resurrected Sense of Stewardship

Read the three practices spelled out on pages 80 and 81 for churches with a resurrected sense of stewardship of their building. Discuss how your church practices these.

RESPONDING (5 MINUTES)

7. Possible Action

Read question 5 on page 91 and allow the group to brainstorm ideas. If there is no extra space in your building, spend the time discussing how your current relationships with groups might improve.

CLOSING (5 MINUTES)

8. Preparing for the Next Session

Remind participants to read chapter 5 and the conclusion before the next session.

9. Prayer

Invite a volunteer to read the prayer on page 92.

Session 5
CHAPTER 5: SUSTAINING THE VISION
AND CONCLUSION

CHAPTER/SESSION THEME

There are many aspects to keeping a vision alive in a congregation. We call for mindfulness in two areas that are tried and true:

1. Surrender to a fresh infusion of the Holy Spirit during worship, seeking new ways to connect with God's presence beyond timeworn categories of traditional vs. contemporary. We must strive for authentic expressions of worship that honor the context and people with whom we live and serve;
2. Build into our DNA a process for mentoring new leaders. The intentionality with which we do this will help us ensure the mission of Christ for coming generations. (p. 121)

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

- Spend some time reflecting on how this study has gone. Are there future actions the group may wish to take? How will this happen once this study is over? If the leadership of your church has not participated, would it help to invite them to attend this final session and hear ideas from the group?
- Opening activity 3 is not meant to be a time to criticize your church's worship. In most churches, the worship wars are constant. Keep the group focused on the positive aspects of worship.
- Gather needed supplies:
 - Books

OPENING (10 MINUTES)

1. Prayer

Welcome participants as they arrive. Pray this prayer or one of your choosing:

*Loving God,
you are the God of the past, the present, and the future.
Open our eyes to your saints from the past.
Help us to learn from them
and recognize the saints among us now.
And equip us to nurture your saints of the future.*

*Trusting in your presence as Creator, Redeemer,
and Sustainer, we pray.
Amen.*

2. Introduction to the Session Theme

Invite volunteers to briefly summarize what was discussed last session. Introduce the theme for today, either in your own words or by reading the session theme above.

3. Spirit-Filled Worship

Recall that the authors say that the function of worship is to lead people into the presence of God. Depending on the size of your group, either form pairs or discuss the following as a whole:

- Describe a worship experience that led you into God’s presence. How did that sustain you?
- How does worship in our church lead people into the presence of God?

EXPLORING

4. Authentic Worship in Your Place

Read aloud the indented paragraph at the bottom of page 103 that describes worship at Shepherd of the Hills Presbyterian Church. Remind the group that three very different churches are described following this paragraph—Farm Church (p. 104), Dinner Church (p. 105), and Church Lab (p. 106). Depending on the size of your group, either work as a whole or form three groups and assign one of the church descriptions to each group. After allowing time for the group to review the description, briefly discuss how any of the described churches’ practices are or might be practiced in your church. What similar types of practices are found in your church?

5. Mentoring New Leaders

Read aloud Rob’s description of the difficulty of mentoring leaders in his church (p. 109). Invite any brief reactions from participants.

Summarize the three suggested practices to build a culture of mentoring leaders on pages 111–13. Ask: How can we improve our culture of mentoring disciples and leaders?

6. Concluding Remarks

Read aloud the following three paragraphs from page 118 and allow brief responses from participants:

Here is the eternal pattern of the Incarnation. Jesus did not use his advantage or privilege as a trump card of power. He did not stay separate from the world around him. He listened with compassion and became available to people, adapting to their realities and teaching in parables they could understand in their vernacular. He emptied himself as an act of service that has guided us for centuries.

Is this our calling? Self-emptying rather than self-preservation? We believe so, but we also know it is scary for leaders who see their roles as maintaining the ABCs we mentioned in the Introduction: attendance, buildings, and cash.

Remember that the most frequent commandment in Scripture is, “Do not be afraid.” The church of Jesus Christ has lived, worked, and died in eras equally as challenging as ours. All the doomsaying about perishing in a “post-Christian culture” only diverts us from our mission.

RESPONDING

7. One Thing We Will Do

Invite participants to review the chapter summaries on pages 120–21. Ask volunteers to name one thing they will do as a result of this study. If appropriate, discuss what your group or church will do as a result of this study. How will you follow up on this?

CLOSING (5 MINUTES)

8. Prayer

Thank people for their participation, and invite a volunteer to read the prayer on page 116.