

Congregational Journaling — A Missional Practice

Missional practices: cultivating new understandings, ways of being, and living Christ's mission

Purpose: To help the Pastor's Leadership Team and the congregation discern the patterns of insight that come through their communal *experiences together* overtime.

It is the nature of ***insight*** to be like stars in the sky. While each star shines its own light, the keen observer looks upward and can often see the constellations that some stars form. Similarly, congregations have specific experiences of discovery or blessing that shed their own individual light. It is good to "step back" periodically and review our experiences over recent months or years. When we do, it is sometimes possible to see how our experiences may "constellate" to form larger patterns of insight. As we journey, if we treat each discovery or blessing as an individual experiences only, we might miss the deeper wisdom that comes from peering into the patterns of insight that may be forming in our midst. This missional practice can help us see the bigger picture.

Steps:

1. The Pastor's Leadership Team selects one or two people to be "congregational journalers." Congregational journalers should:
 - a. Be good writers and *enjoy writing*.
 - b. Be able to distinguish between their personal thoughts and feelings and the experience of the people around them.
 - c. Understand that even when recording what they believe is the group experience, they may not always get it right.
 - d. Use, when possible, metaphors and symbols.

2. The journalers keep a journal to capture important experiences of the PLT and congregation. It is important for the PLT to tell the journalers of those experienced in team meetings. Important experiences to journal are: insights from *Dwelling in the Word* and other missional practices; moments of discovery about the congregation's story, context, or mission; times of inspiration or intimate community arising from shared experiences. *Remember, journal experiences of the PLT, the congregation or significant groups, rather than the personal experience of the journalers.*

3. Each journal entry include:
 - a. The data of what happened. (*On October 11 we had a congregational discussion about mission; on February 3 we broke ground for the community garden.*)

- b. How this “happening” was **experienced** by the congregation. (*We seem both fearful and excited about the idea of discovering what God is doing in the community; there is high energy and enthusiasm about breaking ground for the garden, but low energy—even dread--about managing and caring for the equipment.*)
 - c. Insights the group experienced. (*When we think about our experiences outside church, we have more gifts for ministry than we thought; we may have more gifts about creativity than we do to handling logistics.*)
 - d. Any symbols that emerged as an apt representation of the experience. A symbol might be an object, phrase, or interaction.
4. Meet periodically (2-4 times a year) with the Pastor’s Leadership Team to review the journal. The purpose is to look for insights that stand out when the PLT and the journalers reviews the experiences over a 3 – 6 – 12 month’s period (or more). It is helpful for the PLT to work with journalers to provide excerpts from the journal for congregational reflection and conversation. This can occur in a retreat setting or times of conversation with the congregation throughout the LCM process.
- a. The journalers does not present a proposed “interpretation” of the journal entries to the Pastor’s Leadership Team or congregation. Rather, the Pastor’s Leadership Team reviews the entries with the journalers, engaging in conversation about any points that might stand out, patterns that emerge, etc.
 - b. The PLT or congregation may also consider how insights shared may lead to the development and launch of a ministry experiment.
5. Note insights that arise, and discuss how they might inform the congregation’s approach to ministry and mission.

Tips for the Process:

Sometimes, the journalers may wish to share their perceptions with the pastor, a mature minister, or other astute person just to “check” their perception of what the congregation has experienced.

The journal is record of meaningful moments in the journey. It is not a record of every activity.