**Envision, Experiment, Evaluate – Essential Questions for Leading Discernment and Planning**

Each process step and the associated questions will likely need a separate time of gathering for discernment and discussion. Allow multiple meetings if needed for conversations and ideas to mature over time – be patient! The Evaluate Step and questions/conversation will occur after the experiments have been launched and an agreed upon time period has elapsed. This will conversation will require careful listening and pastoral sensitivity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Step</th>
<th>Preparatory Notes</th>
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| Envision – Missional  | What specific practices help us create safe space for discernment and conversation? (See Valuing the Other, Forgiveness, Dwelling in the Word, Sharing in the Round) How do we create opportunities for all voices to be heard? (See Valuing the Other) Review Practicing Prophetic Imagination in Community for some ideas on how to cultivate a willingness to risk new ideas. | 1. Lead Connecting, Centering, and Dwelling in the Word (Suggestions – D&C 162:2e, D&C 163:1, D&C 164:9d, Luke 5:1-11, 1 Cor. 19-23)  
2. Ask the following questions and record responses on flip chart paper: How has the Spirit been disrupting you/us with new insights? What do you think/feel the Spirit is leading us to consider next on the journey? (Allow a few moments for quiet reflection)  
3. Consider the following two aspects of mission: 1) What we do when we gather, and 2) How we are sent in mission. Consider the following questions: How is the Spirit calling us to risk something new in how we gather and are sent? Specifically, what might an experiment look like and who feels led to try? (Note: Every experiment should have at least two individuals)  
4. Celebrate and Review Lessons Learned from Experiments: As we look to the future what do we continue and what do we discontinue to make room for God’s emerging vision among us? |
| Experiments           | Review Experiments – Mission is Risking Something New for ideas on how to conceive and launch experiments. It may also be helpful to ask the group to think back over their experiences during the past few months. Provide time for individuals to silently write prayers and insights that have been emerging on newsprint attached to the wall. Review the insights together. This may help stimulate responses to the questions under #3. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Evaluate              | Provide sufficient time to celebrate all experiments regardless of the outcome. Discuss lessons learned, what needs to continue, and what should be discontinued. (See Difficult Conversations – How to Discuss What Matters Most) |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
Practicing Prophetic Imagination in Community

The Prophetic Imagination - An Introduction

Prophetic practice, as evidenced in the Old Testament, consists in the courage, freedom, and daring to see the world differently. That difference is rooted in the old covenant traditions, but is brought to bear upon contemporary issues of power, injustice, and inhumaneness. It is no wonder that such a capacity to “imagine” the world differently refuses dominant ideologies of state, church, and corporation that serve status quo vested interests and seeks always to expose and subvert such mis-truth that deceives and denies. It is for good reason that prophetic imaging is characteristically done in daring metaphor, surprising rhetoric, and scandalous utterance, for to do less is to fall back into conventional distortions of reality.

In prophetic re-description of the world, God—the creator who saves Israel and who is known among us in Jesus of Nazareth—is reckoned as a decisive player in the drama of the world.

Indeed, God as decisive character matters so much that all other players—leaders, states, empires—are repositioned and called to account.

In the ancient world of the Old Testament, prophetic imagination exposed the folly of state aggrandizement (in Israel and elsewhere), religious absolutism (in the claims of Jerusalem), and brutality against the neighbor (effected through the normal workings of the economy). It conjured a better world that extended mercy and justice to the weak and marginalized. In our contemporary world, prophetic imagination can do no less. Its task—neither conservative nor liberal—is to expose and critique the false ideologies of consumer militarism and to propose a better world of neighborly justice and mercy. As in the ancient world, so now in our contemporary world, such practice—rooted in old texts and memories—requires courage, freedom, and daring, nothing less than the work of voicing and enacting the world anew...according to the holiness of God.

Walter Brueggemann, Prophetic Imagination, 2006

Prophetic Imagination and Community of Christ

In Community of Christ we have come to understand the idea of prophetic imagination as our call to be a prophetic people. From the earliest days of our movement we envisioned a day when God’s people would be of one heart and one mind and there would be no poor among them (Doctrine and Covenants 36:2h,i). Being prophetic consists of several steps:

1. give time and space to be awake to God’s presence and invitation
2. publically challenge situations and relationships not in harmony with God’s vision for creation,
3. see God’s intended future in relationship with God and one another,
4. risk co-creating and living into God’s future together.
When we enter the stories of scripture we can engage in prophetic imagination alongside the prophets and other writers by imagining a time when justice and peace will prevail in situations and relationships that do not reflect Christ’s vision of the peaceable kingdom of God on earth (Doctrine and Covenants 163:3). In other words, we too can write the story not heard before for our generation.

Can we develop our capacity to imagine the future with God? Throughout history there have been men and women who despite their current reality were compelled to not only imagine but co-create an alternative future with God. Their faith in God’s movement, which was always ahead of their time, compelled them to continue to risk a new future - even when the evidence around them seemed to point to the contrary.

**Prophetic Imagination – A Working Definition**

In relationship with God and one another we see situations and relationships as they are and as they could be and then courageously live into that future together.

We are called to become a people who find God’s future more compelling than the current reality – a reality whose gravitational pull to maintain the status quo is pervasive. So how do we develop our capacity to do this? In LCM we suggest eight possibilities for consideration:

**Developing Capacity for Prophetic Imagination:**

a. Encounter God’s movement (where God is active), where we encounter God’s hope!
b. Eliminate clutter (i.e. spiritual, psychological, schedule, etc.) and create space for prophetic imagination to emerge.
c. Deepen conversation about things that matter.
d. Encounter human suffering in all its forms (i.e. loneliness, poverty, hunger, disease, etc.) by risking new relationships with strangers.
e. Dwell in the Living Word, hymns, song lyrics, movies, nature, art and other ways to open your imagination.
f. Utilize scripture to ground oneself in the story of God’s unfolding vision of justice and peace. In concert with the Holy Spirit, practice envisioning an alternative future (i.e. through prayer, poems, journaling, or drawing) that eliminates the specific suffering we encounter.
g. Risk an experiment to alleviate the encountered suffering regardless of conventional wisdom that may suggest the futility of the effort.

a. **Encounter God’s movement, encounter Hope** – Our hope is not found in fleeting optimism but grounded in spiritual formation (i.e. missional practices) in relationship with God and one another. This leads us to a deepening awareness of God’s movement and future emerging all around us.
Essential Question: How can the Pastor Leadership Team cultivate an environment that invites and challenges disciples to go deeper in their commitment to daily missional practices and experiences of worship together?

b. Eliminate clutter (i.e. spiritual, psychological, schedule, etc.) and create space for prophetic imagination to emerge – Our lives are filled with constant distractions and some are of our own making! Are we widening the spaces throughout our day to become more fully aware of what is going on around us? How do we reduce extraneous noise and tune in to God’s promptings that lead us into new relationships and vision? Is our congregational experience creating space for God’s disruptive vision or are we going through the motions each week?

Essential Question: How can the Pastor Leadership Team help the congregation move from an activities-based model of church to one where we slow down and orient our experience around our desire for more meaningful time (i.e. space) with God and one another?

c. Deepen conversation about things that matter – When we risk relationships that move from surface conversation (i.e. weather, sports, safe topics) to meaningful conversation (i.e. life, love, marriage, family, faith, hopes, fears, God, etc.) we create space for the Holy Spirit to draw us into deeper and even sacred community. In these relationships of meaning and purpose we discover new things about ourselves and others. Our relationships become sacramental experiences that give us glimpses into God’s future and desire for loving communities that signal the coming reign of God.

Essential Question: How can the Pastor Leadership Team model engage in meaningful relationships and create new opportunities during and outside Sunday morning for deeper relationships to develop?

d. Encounter human suffering in all its forms by risking new relationships with strangers – Mission begins with encounter. We encounter God in many ways including situations and relationships that may at times seem furthest from realizing God’s potential and vision. It is in the dark places that we are most drawn to the light of Christ’s emerging peace. When we allow ourselves to become vulnerable to human suffering we are changed as the Holy Spirit blesses us with clarity about the present and the possibilities of God’s future.

Essential Question: How can the Pastor Leadership Team foster experiences where the congregation has opportunity to be in relationship with their neighbors, their stories, and their hopes for an alternative future?

e. Dwell in the living Word, song lyrics, movies, nature, art, and other ways to open your imagination – As we de-clutter and enlarge the space in our hearts and minds there is now room for new insights to emerge. We dwell when we spend considerable time immersing ourselves in scripture, nature, art, or other ways of opening our minds and hearts to new ideas and possibilities. The Holy Spirit works through many avenues to reveal divine purposes and only requires our willingness and openness to see with new eyes.
Essential Question – What are some creative ways the Pastor Leadership Team can use scripture, song, movies, nature, and art in worship, small group experiences, and retreats to open the hearts and minds of disciples to new possibilities for the future?

f. Utilize scripture to ground oneself in the unfolding story of God's justice and peace. In concert with the Holy Spirit, practice envisioning an alternative future (i.e. through prayer, poems, journaling, or drawing) that eliminates the specific suffering we encounter – The prophets of old and modern day prophetic voices challenge us to envision a world different than the present reality. By reading alongside the prophets we begin to understand their ability to describe their current reality, grieve at conditions of human suffering, and give voice to God's alternative future of justice and peace. As we look at similar situations in our day we can practice envisioning an alternative future together – God's future. We can give voice to that future and invite others to join us in co-creating that future in partnership with God.

Essential Questions – How can we (i.e. Pastor Leadership Team with the congregation) use prophetic texts (ancient and modern day) to clearly see and articulate current injustices in our day and practice giving voice to our best understanding of God's future? How can we then invite others to join us in co-creating the future in partnership with God?

g. Risk an experiment to alleviate the encountered human suffering regardless of conventional wisdom that may suggest the futility of the effort – “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for the evidence of things unseen” (Hebrews 11:1). When we begin to enact our vision for the future by taking concrete steps to alleviate human suffering, we co-create the future with God. By stepping boldly into situations others may consider hopeless we create pathways for others to follow and join in on God's emerging future. We exercise faith when we risk new ministries and actions out of a compelling vision, not knowing for sure how it will all turn out.

Essential Question – How can the Pastor Leadership Team create an environment where disciples feel free and supported to risk new actions in partnership with one another and God?
Experiments – Mission is Risking Something New

In Retreat 3 we explored the enduring principle - Continuing Revelation - and how we are to be a prophetic people that see beyond the present to God’s unfolding future. We explored an application of Continuing Revelation explained by Walter Brueggemann called prophetic imagination. We explored the following steps for cultivating prophetic imagination:

1. give time and space to be awake to God's presence and invitation,
2. publicly challenge situations and relationships not in harmony with God’s vision for creation,
3. in relationship with God and one another, envision God’s intended future, and
4. risk co-creating and living into God’s future together.

Experiments are how we enact or live into what we imagine in partnership with God and one another. We engage in missional practices to open our spiritual eyes to see ourselves, others, and our world through the lens of God's unfolding vision. Experiments are how we incrementally, through trial and error, experiment our way into the future with God. Experiments are a key stepping stone in the missional process below:

ENCOUNTER - A Divine Unsettledness
New and Ancient practices lead to new understandings,

DISCOVER - New Questions Emerge
New understandings lead to new prophetic imagination,

ENVISION - New Insights Emerge
New prophetic imagination leads to new missional experiments,

EXPERIMENT - New Ministries Emerge
New missional experiments lead to new forms of missional life in community,

EVALUATE - RENEW - Ongoing Journey
New forms of missional life lead to a new clarity among competing priorities, and the process continues . . .
Everything we have been doing in LCM leads to **RISKING SOMETHING NEW WITH GOD** and one another for the sake of our world now!

If we truly seek to embody and live the concerns and passion of Christ then at some point along our journey we will see with new eyes the chasm that exists between the reality of the present and possibility of God’s future!

It is in this space that **MISSION IS TRULY DISRUPTIVE** and compels us to risk stepping with God into the future.

Experimentation is at the heart of incarnational mission – to encounter the Living Christ and then to live and convey essential truths in new language and form!\(^1\) This is the Word made flesh in every new context!\(^2\) This is the call of a prophetic people!

_You live in a world with new challenges, and that world will require new forms of ministry._ - Doctrine and Covenants 162:2c

So how do we approach experimentation in the congregation or any small group resting in the status quo? Generally speaking we don't like change. Experimentation is change and leads to new forms of ministry. Our approach to experimentation, as a pastor leadership team (PLT), has everything to do with whether we gradually step into the future with God or remain entrenched in the status quo.

First we must communicate, clearly and often, with the congregation or small group that we are not pursuing wholesale change but learning to follow God into the future by taking small, but significant steps. According to Alan Roxburgh,

> “People have to be reassured that much of their congregational life will remain fairly familiar, and there will be no structural or organizational changes. Rather they should know that they and their leaders are going to discern some creative experiments to address the real, critical, adaptive challenges in becoming a missional community.”

The role of the Pastor Leadership Team is to create a stable environment by continuing core ministry functions (i.e. worship, pastoral care, disciple formation) while beginning to experiment around the edges of the congregation with new forms of ministry and outreach. Experiments are not to disrupt core ministry functions. Rather, they begin to point to the possibility of an alternative future for the congregation.

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1. Doctrine and Covenants 162:2e
In the experiment step like all steps RELATIONSHIPS ARE EVERYTHING! In this step we must pay attention to the transitions some people will experience as they begin to realize not everything is going to stay the same. This requires attentiveness, patience, and a willingness to proactively check in with people before they begin to withdraw or exhibit other forms of resistance or even sabotage.

Conceiving and Launching Experiments

So how does the Pastor Leadership Team go about launching experiments? Guidelines can help everyone know the ground rules and reduce potential misunderstandings. Here are some guidelines:

- Individuals involved in an experiment need to convey what they hope will happen as a result of the experiment and how they will evaluate the outcomes of the experiment. Sometimes individuals may need a little help expressing their hopes and outcomes. Patience and attentiveness is critical at this stage!
- When it comes to ministry experiments we are often taking a leap of faith. It is critical for the Pastor Leadership Team to continually remind the congregation that some experiments will work well and others not so well. In all cases we will learn together and celebrate our willingness to step into the future with God! Don’t over analyze a proposal or idea for an experiment.
- Experiments that affect the ministries or responsibilities of others need to be coordinated and approved by those affected. Providing an environment conducive to experiments does not mean anything goes.
- Like everything we do in mission, experiments are best when shared with others. The Pastor Leadership Team ensures anyone initiating an experiment has at least one partner for support.
- Congregational approval is not needed for an experiment that will not utilize congregational resources or affect existing ministries of the congregation. The nature of experiments requires that the Pastor Leadership Team create an environment favorable toward risk. Do not hamper experiments with elaborate or unnecessary steps for approval.
- Provide updates to the congregation on successes, challenges, and lessons learned during or throughout the experiment.
- Be attentive to those willing to risk new experiments by often praying for them, offering words of encouragement, and helping coordinate any assistance they may need.

Unlike the scientific method, missional experiments are often less measurable. We don’t always know the outcome of experiments when first started. Sometimes they are leaps of faith. Regardless of the outcome we want to create an environment that supports those willing to take the risk and learn from their experience.

Let’s consider an example. Three people in a congregation want to explore this essential question discerned by the congregation: How is God calling us to develop a relationship with our neighborhood? The group decides to meet every other week in a local coffee house. They commit to talking to others who come into the coffee house. The desired
outcome of this experiment may be as simple as wanting to have at least one meaningful conversation with someone from the local neighborhood during each coffee house visit. The group agrees to meet for 3 months and then assess if they will continue based on how the group feels about the encounters.

Experiments don’t need to be complicated. The role of the Pastor Leadership Team is to encourage prophetic imagination (i.e. inspired new ideas) that lead to experiments that lead to new forms of ministry in a changing world (See The Prophetic Imagination – An Introduction for ideas to stimulate inspiration).

Questions to Get You Experimenting

Questions to consider when your prophetic imagination is at work and you are preparing to risk an experiment:

1. What ideas pop into your mind as you pray about mission, share with others in conversation, or engage in the missional practices?
2. Do any of the ideas energize or disrupt you because they connect with your sense of passion or an unfilled need?
3. How do the ideas connect with one or more of the five mission initiatives?
4. What do you hope will happen if you try your idea as an experiment?
5. Who else does your experiment involve?
6. How will you describe your experiment to the others involved and get their support?
7. What do you need to start your experiment?
8. What’s stopping you from experimenting?
9. How can the Pastor Leadership Team help facilitate your experiment?
10. What period of time is needed for doing the experiment before stepping back to evaluate the outcomes with others?
11. If the experiment is successful and is becoming part of the missional life of the congregation, what do you give up to make room for this new ongoing ministry?

Remember, the missional practices create fertile ground for new insights (i.e. prophetic imagination) as does our willingness to be in conversation and dream a little about God’s future in the places we serve. On the last page of this document you will find a suggested format for constructing an experiment entitled “Launching Experiments”.

Potential Areas for Experiments

As you reflect on your experience with leading your congregation in mission consider some of the following potential areas for experiments:

- Discuss and pray about one or more essential questions for the future of mission in your congregation. These questions are an excellent source for new ideas and experiments.
• Consider ways to deepen relationships outside the congregation with special retreats or activities like Sharing Your Congregational Story.

• Experiment with different forms of worship that deepen relationships with God, one another, and your neighbors. (See Worship as Community Practice from Retreat 2. At the end of this resource you will find sample worship outlines where you can experiment with different forms of worship. Remember to experiment around the edges. Use wisdom about how many times each month you experiment with new forms of worship. Be aware and sensitive to your congregation.)

• Experiment with new ways to stimulate prophetic imagination. (See The Prophetic Imagination – An Introduction from Retreat 3 for ideas on how to cultivate an environment favorable for prophetic imagination.)

• Experiment with the three shared missional practices— Dwelling in the Word, Mission Prayer, and Sharing in the Round. How can these practices be integrated into worship, fellowship activities, and small groups?

• Experiment with new missional practices. Consider developing meaningful practices that draw you into relationship with God, one another, and your neighbors? Remember practices are a commitment to a repetitive discipline that over time can become a new way of life.

• Experiment with any of the five mission initiatives. Pose essential questions for each mission initiative. Then begin to envision what experiments would look like to test your questions.

The possibilities for experiments are endless! May the Spirit disrupt and guide you into new insights, experiments, and forms of ministry in a changing world!
Launching Experiments

The intent of this document is to help assist an individual or group express their idea and approach for an experiment.

Proposed Idea or Question – In a few sentences describe your idea or question. You may also wish to share what led you to this idea or question.

Proposed Experiment - In a few sentences share how you would like to approach testing your idea or question. Consider the following as an outline:

- What steps will you take to experiment with your idea or test your question?
- Who will you involve in your experiment? (It is strongly encouraged that everyone have at least one person to partner with in their experiment)
- What is the time frame for your experiment?
- What outcomes do you hope to realize?

Resources – In a few sentences outline any resource needs (i.e. people, money, use of church building etc.) to launch your experiment.

Points of Collaboration – Does your proposed experiment touch any existing ministries or activities of the congregation? If so who do you need to collaborate with prior to moving forward with your experiment?

Reflection and Evaluation – What are some initial ideas on how you might evaluate your progress against your hoped for outcomes? This is not intended to discourage the experiment but to open up conversation that may be helpful in constructing the experiment.

Check In – At what intervals do you plan on sharing your experiences and progress? Also when do you plan to step back and evaluate with your partner(s) if the experiment should continue.