

Observing the landscape of American churches these days, it's tempting to feel disheartened. Like the rest of the country, we're struggling with fragmentation: Our people feel isolated and alone, our congregations are clustering into factions of similar people seeking to find belonging with others who look and sound like us. And as leaders, we often feel like we're helpless to stop the flood of those exiting our congregations. However, we still have hope for churches in the U.S. We believe that God's Spirit is at work among us... if we have eyes to see and courage to respond. Scripture is a long rich story of God working through imperfect people and imperfect communities. And we believe the Holy Spirit is at work among us, equipping us with what is needed to embody a contrasting way of life.

**We envision churches as robust communities walking together in the way of Jesus, in which all members are received as gifts and are cared for, embodying a hopeful alternative to the despair of our culture.**

Englewood Christian Church (Indianapolis) and Missio Alliance have partnered to launch *Cultivating Communities*, a growing network of cohorts across North America, each composed of congregations that are conversant with the way of Jesus in their respective places. Our team is committed to journeying with existing congregations who desire to cultivate a deeper life together in Christ and overflow into tangible love for the communities in which they are embedded.

*Cultivating Communities* offers helpful resources and relationships for congregations to do the hard work of maturing into 'real communities' that share a common life together and care about everything that is essential and necessary for life. Congregations, as part of small local cohorts, will

- learn to ask questions of themselves and to practice discernment, through the presence of the Holy Spirit;
- identify their unique contexts and gifts;
- and cultivate habits, skills, and capacities to build rich formation as a congregation... even in the midst of disagreements. Through cultivating these practices of commitment, patience, conversation, and forgiveness, congregations build trust and unity, in order to mature into the way and likeness of Jesus.

Churches are intended to be real communities of hope, not swept up in the despair around us. This initiative invites churches to join a learning cohort and recognize that through God's presence among us, we're empowered to bear witness to a hopeful and contrasting way of life together.