

# Moving Back into the Neighborhood

The Workbook | by Alan Roxburgh

# Moving Back into the Neighborhood - The Workbook

*Unlimited Edition*

First Edition, 2010

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This book is dedicated to the many friends who lie behind this work. Special thanks to Mark Lau Branson and John McLaverty who have been a constant source of encouragement to me on this journey.



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## The Passion

Twenty years ago I wrote *Reaching a New Generation*, describing the tectonic shifts that would re-shape the relationship between Christian life and the culture of North America. The intervening years have shown that these shifts continue to re-arrange the nature of church life for us all. In the latter part of that book, I reflected on many of the efforts to renew, reform and reshape the church to engage this emerging context. Thinking ahead and imagining what it might mean to be God's witnessing people I wrote these words:

*Today's church is in crisis. Its renewal requires far more than liturgical change or doctrinal correction. Focusing on new structures...not an adequate response. The tectonic plates of Western culture are shifting. As modernity's questioned and parts rejected, the church is also questioned and marginalized... Despite all our protestations the church in North America remains focused on itself. Until this is changed, evangelization will continue to look like forays into the world in order to recruit members for our clubs.*

It is this rethinking and reworking of both the inside and outside, and how they are interrelated, that motivates me. I concluded the book with a picture of the way ahead which was not about bigger and bigger churches Christians drive to, nor more churches effective at getting other Christians into their buildings. I saw a different kind of movement involving thousands and thousands of lights being lit in neighborhoods and communities across the continent, as God's people moved back into their neighborhoods to rediscover that God was already ahead of them creating and calling forth that which was new. We have developed this workbook for those groups that want to take some initial, exploratory steps into their neighborhoods, in order to discern what God is up to and to join the Holy Spirit in making all things new.

This *Workbook* started many years ago in Toronto as I was learning to read the communities around my church on the Danforth. It took form in the BUILD program and then, again, as I was teaching at McMaster Divinity College preparing leaders for the ministry in a radically changing world. It took the present form as Mark Lau Branson and I worked with numerous DMin cohorts at Fuller Seminary and began a series of *Moving Back into the Neighborhood* workshops across the country.



# Introduction

*"I was talking with a friend recently who said she had over 600 'friends' on Facebook but didn't know anyone in here neighborhood - what's that about?" BBC Report, December 2009.*

*Jesus...said to them: The Law can be summed up in this way: You shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart and soul and mind; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27).*

*The entire law can be summed up in a single commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself (Galatians 5:14).*

This workbook is designed to assist people in a local church discover what God might be up to in their neighborhoods and among their neighbors, and plan for ways of joining with God there.

Neighborhoods are the contexts into which God calls us to live the mission of Jesus. Some of the most radical ways we can be God's people are also the most obvious ways of being human. This is as it should be! St. Augustine, long ago, said that what God was doing in Jesus was making us, again, fully human. That being human is most clearly expressed through Jesus and what we describe as the Incarnation: 'he came and pitched his tent beside ours' (John 1: 14). Rather than use complex, abstract explanations, the meaning of the Incarnation is wonderfully expressed in Joan Osborne's song "One of Us". She asks: *What if God was one of us...?* Some may be offended by what appears as impertinence, but it is far closer to the reality of the Incarnation than our romantic, sentimental pictures of Jesus. Another way to translate John's description of the Incarnation is like this: *He moved into the neighborhood and settled in right beside us.* It doesn't get much clearer or simpler! That's the character of a local church.

Do you want to know where to find Jesus today? Have you ever wondered how to go about figuring out what God is up to in the world? Are you wondering about how to shape local churches that aren't boring or merely a poor substitute for the self-help programs on TV? The response to each is the same: join with Jesus and move back into the neighborhood because that's where we'll connect with what God is up to. There, in the ordinariness and humanness of a neighborhood, we will discover what it means to be Christian and, in so doing, start to get what it's like to be more fully human.

## Resources

You will find a variety of resources that are available for your use as you move through each part of the workbook. *Part 5: Resources* will be the central place you can find a list of all the resources recommended in the Workbook.



## Videos

A number of the *MBiN Resources* are simple, downloadable video interviews. In *Part 5: Resources* you will find a list of all the videos recommended for viewing. You can access all videos at the **MBiN Group** on the RMN Vimeo site at <http://vimeo.com/groups/mbin>.

### **MBiN involves:**

1. **Listening** to the narratives of the people in your neighborhoods
2. **Seeing** that God is already ahead of you and involved!
3. **Asking** where you are being called to join with what God is already doing.
4. **Cultivating** new practices of Christian life.

### **\*MBiN**

For the rest of the *Workbook*, Moving Back into the Neighborhood will be referred to as *MBiN*.

## What is involved in MBiN\*?

First, a strong desire to know and pay attention to the stories and narratives of the people in our neighborhood is involved. Without this we'll turn people into a 'mission project'. Our neighbors are not the objects of our work or an assignment for getting people into a church building; they are God's precious creation. Our calling is to walk with and beside them in order to call forth the stories and narratives that are among these people and comprise the wonderful character of the community. It will be in this kind of walking that two things will happen. First, we will discover ways of connecting people's stories with the story of Jesus and, second, we will be so challenged and provoked by what the Spirit is up to in our community that our understanding of the Gospel and the church will be turned upside down. We will be changed!

Second, seeing God is already ahead of us is involved. Our neighborhood and community is where the Spirit is already up to something. Too often we've been told that God is in the church building or its programs, but God is also very much out there in our communities and we're being invited to re-make our local churches by turning our attention and life back to our communities. This isn't in any way diminishing the importance of the community and liturgy of our churches; it's asking new questions about what they are for and how we shape them.

Third, asking where I am being called to join with what God is up to in the neighborhood is also involved. Notice the implication. We're not talking about a church developing its own programs then looking for the best ways to communicate (market) them to people. On the contrary, we are inviting you into a different way of being in your community. You will spend a good bit of time in Luke 10: 1- 12. It suggests that God is already ahead of us and is at work in our neighborhoods. This may sound counterintuitive to what we have come to understand about the Gospel. The Luke text we will dwell in throughout the coming weeks tells us that God's Spirit is already out ahead of us up to things currently under our radar. Jesus is already in the neighborhood. The Spirit is already sowing seeds, gestating God's future. Christians in a local church are being called to enter their neighborhoods as midwives who work with the Spirit in naming and calling forth the kingdom in ways we've hardly begun to imagine.

Fourth, cultivating new practices of local Christian life is involved. These are practices of awakening, listening, hospitality, risking experiments in joining with God, and a willingness to believe that the shape of ministry and mission for our local church comes from the neighborhood rather than our programs and presuppositions.

## What the *MBiN Workbook* will do...

This *Workbook* is a:

- Tool to assist a local church in learning how to move back into the neighborhoods of its people.
- Street-level guide to engagement with the communities where the people of your church live and work.
- Map for directing your people in how to answer the questions: What is God up to in our neighborhood? How do we join with God?
- Resource for developing skills for engaging with the people.
- Primer in how you can become a local theologian for your church.

People usually ask us: What do you mean by neighborhood? Is it the area around the church building or some other area?

Here is our answer:

*Neighborhood is usually used in this Workbook to refer to the places where people in the church live and work. However, because some members may live near the sanctuary, and because we do not believe the sanctuary's location is either accidental or incidental to God, we will invite a group to explore and discern God's call concerning that neighborhood.*

Lots of people drive some distance to the building where they meet Sunday by Sunday. It's unlikely that they will enter this locale and build relationships with those from whom they are disconnected by a large distance. We are assuming that people's involvement in their church is an important one, and we believe that various gatherings for worship, fellowship, and education can be linked powerfully with the missional call. For this reason, the *Workbook* is built around the idea that neighborhood is about where you live, not primarily where your sanctuary is located.

However, we also know that God is involved with the neighbors around your sanctuary – whether this locale is residential or commercial. For some congregations, the neighborhood was previously the place of residence for members, but decades of changes have shifted these social realities. For others, a sanctuary site may have been chosen based on matters of convenience or finances. We would encourage, perhaps as a later stage of this process, for a small group to spend perhaps six months in entering this locale with the same purposes and steps we provide for the neighborhoods around member residences. We know churches in which God has called members to relocate as a church's vocation became clearer; we have also seen churches reshaped as nearby residents enter into and help reshape the congregation. Our confidence is in the Holy Spirit and we believe this adventure – in all of these neighborhoods – is holy and energizing and difficult and promising.



### Coaching TIPS

These next two sections help you get clear on what this *Workbook* is designed to do and what it can't do for you. This will assist you to position it inside the overall planning and programming of your church.

## What the *MBiN Workbook* will not do...

This *Workbook* has a limited goal: to assist people to reconnect with their neighborhoods as a primary means of being God's people. It is a resource for local churches to create experiments in moving back into the neighborhood; it's only part of a larger strategy of mission-shaped transformation.

It does not give you a mechanism to do overall, adaptive, mission-shaped change across the church's systems, groups, and structures. If you are interested in exploring how to do this kind of transformation, we recommend you contact RMN ([www.roxburghmissionalnet.com](http://www.roxburghmissionalnet.com)) for more information on some of the following resources:

- Workshops and events around mission-shaped innovation
- Processes for developing mission-shaped leadership skills
- How to lead a whole church through a process of discovering and affirming missional life as its primary identity.
- Books in our *Missional Innovations Series* (see Suggested Reading).
- 360 Surveys

### Suggested Reading



- *Introducing the Missional Church* (Roxburgh and Boren, Baker, 2009).
- *The Missional Leader* (Roxburgh and Romanuk, Jossey-Bass, 2006).
- *Missional Mapmaking* (Roxburgh, Jossey-Bass, 2010).

# 1. The Workbook

This first part of the *MBiN Workbook* is designed to introduce and familiarize people with what it's all about. There are a number of ways leadership may use this introductory section:

- For their own preparation, then design the specific ways they want to use it in the church, or
- Provide sections of this material to people in the church through small groups, asking them to interact in their small groups with the *Group Work* provided.

Each church will have its own particular ways of introducing the Workbook. We recommend leaders read through this section and determine the most effective ways of introducing the material in their churches.

## Getting Started

You will want to begin by taking some time to familiarize yourself with the *Workbook*. Look over the major sections and get a sense of the overall flow and development in the *Workbook*. You will also want to spend some time with the following recommendations:

1. Read the two Scripture texts (Luke 10:27 and Galatians 5:14) printed at the beginning of the Introduction. If you're with a group, read them aloud several times, then wait quietly together without saying anything; simply let the texts be present among you and wait in their presence. After several minutes invite people to share how these texts engaged them. You can do this by asking people to respond to one of these questions: Where was my attention drawn in this text and why? How might these texts ask new questions of me? What questions do I have from hearing these texts? If you're reading this introduction by yourself, read the text several times out loud, then be still with it for a few minutes and respond to these questions for yourself.
2. Familiarize yourself with *Dwelling in the Word* found in *Part 5: Resources*.
3. Watch the Simon Carey Holt video series *God Next Door* where Simon describes his introduction to the question: What does my neighborhood have to do with my Christian life?
4. Consider: what might Jesus' summary of the Commandments mean for where you live and your neighborhood?



### Videos

All the videos referred to in the *MBiN Workbook* can be found at the **MBiN Group** on the RMN Vimeo Channel: <http://vimeo.com/groups/mbin>.



### Dwelling in the Word

*Dwelling in the Word* is a central practice in this process. You will find a detailed description of this practice in *Part 5: Resources*.

5. As you imagine presenting this workbook to your leadership and local church, think of a story about an unexpected, unplanned moment that changed the way you saw some aspect of your neighborhood. Your personal stories will go a long way in connecting people with what this process is all about.
6. Explain and introduce *MBiN* to people. Your leadership and the people of your church will want you to provide some compelling reasons for getting engaged in the adventure described in the *Workbook*. You know your church community far better than anything we can present in this *Workbook*. What follows are some of the ways we have learned to respond to people's questions. Look them over in order to determine the best ways to share with your leadership a good reason for engaging this work. You may have some great responses that aren't covered in this section. Let us know and we'll add them to the *Workbook* to assist others in the journey. Create your own list and ways of sharing the important explanations your people want to hear.
  - a) God is active in our neighborhoods. The first proposal is that we discover what God's up to in the world and what it means to be the church as we move back into the neighborhood. This is both a simple and radical proposal. Why radical? Because for many of us there is little connection between where we live, where we go to church and what it means to be a Christian. That's the tragic state of Christian life in North America. Christian leaders regularly tell me that they have no time to know who lives in their neighborhood and, besides, they tell me, neighborhoods are a thing of the past, that's the 'old' way of thinking, we don't live like that today. A radical way we can re-form Christian life in our time is by this simple decision to reconnect with our neighborhoods. This proposal invites you to discover a spiritual practice of asking what God is up to in your neighborhood. If you want to recover the sanity of your life and that of your family in deeply Christian practices, reconnect and reenter your neighborhood.
  - b) God has already gifted the people of our churches. God has already gifted and called the ordinary men and women in ordinary churches to participate with the Holy Spirit. This *Workbook* is written out of the conviction that we discover what the Spirit is up to in this crazy, changing, unthinkable time of ours as we learn to cultivate a church that is different than the ones that have shaped us to this point. However, this is not a workbook that intends to criticize the church. In fact, experience has shown us that God's imagination for mission and ministry is already

#### **Explaining MBiN**

- God is Active
- God has already gifted people in our churches
- Ask New Questions
- Called to be Mission-Shaped
- Communities are changing
- Globalization
- Staying current with our communities

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The *MBiN Workbook* is asking different kinds of **questions**, such as:

- What is God up to in our neighborhoods?
- What does this say to us about being church together in this area?
- What does this way of seeing say about what God is already doing in our neighborhoods and how we shape our worship and sense of community as a people?

present among the people of many ordinary congregations. This workbook is for those people and those congregations. It relishes and celebrates the ordinary and the life of a local church. Yes, church structures and programs do, indeed, need to be changed, but this is neither the point nor the focus of this *Workbook*. We are writing out of a far different set of convictions.

- The days of the local church aren't over;
- Churches are the places God is always 'making all things new'; and
- The key to being made new and recovering mission involves learning how to move back into the neighborhood. This last part sounds easy; but it's difficult and requires significant changes in the ways we think about being the church.

- c) Asking new Questions. Our sight and our habits can begin to be reshaped as we ask new questions about God, ourselves, and our neighbors. The questions in the left margin are God and neighbor-directed questions, not tactics for getting people to become outwardly focused. These are questions about being God's people in a community; and when we ask God-questions, it's not about inside or outside but something entirely different. This *Workbook* invites you to ask God-questions about your neighborhood and your church. It's a tool for local churches interested in developing a new imagination about being God's people in their neighborhoods and communities.
- d) A local church is called to be a mission-shaped people. The reason local churches are called into existence is that they might be God missionary people where they are. For too long local churches assumed that this mission was about getting people to come to them and join their church. What they did, therefore, was design church buildings and programs to attract people to come to their church. Successful mission was when churches grew and filled up with people. The time when we could assume people naturally make church part of their life is passed. We need a different way of being God's people where a local church is shaped by what God is up to in its neighborhoods and communities.
- e) Our Communities are changing dramatically. Our communities are moving from those homogenized neighborhoods where everyone looked the same. Our neighbors are now a part of the new pluralized, globalized world forming before our eyes. Neighborhoods are now characterized by multiple, competing value systems living side by side in the same community. We can no longer assume that the people

next door understand our way of thinking and living. Loving our neighbor as ourselves requires from us a willingness to welcome the stranger across the street, rather than retreating into safe ghettos filled with people just like us. This is about living as Jesus did when he came to pitch his tent beside ours; it calls for a local church that practices dwelling in our neighborhoods and asking what God is up to there.

- f) Globalization is creating new kinds of neighborhoods across the street and around the corner where we live. This is the work of the Spirit. As God's people we're being invited to join with the Spirit by pitching our tent beside the varieties of cultures living all around us. Our worlds are no longer separated by national and ethnic boundaries. Migration patterns within nations (the massive shift to suburbanization that continues) are radically affecting our neighborhoods. Immigration brings all kinds of different racial and ethnic groups in close proximity to us. The worldviews of our neighbors are varied and changed; we need to remember that it was only a short time ago we all lived in pretty much monocultural settings and our churches were built around that reality. People see the world very differently than they did just a few short years ago. Jesus' disciples will be shaped by spiritual practices for engaging their neighborhoods, asking what God is up to and joining God in these places.
- g) Staying in touch with our changing communities. The communities where we live are the primary context of the church's calling. They are changing. Three to five years is now an eternity in terms of the changes happening in our communities. Programs and strategies that were effective five years ago no longer connect with people. We have to stay in touch with our changing communities so we don't become ingrown, irrelevant timepieces, reflecting a particular era and a single ethnic group. The Spirit never intended local churches to be guardians of cultural timepieces. No matter how much our established experiences of church please us or meet our aesthetic needs, this has never been God's intention. This does not mean throwing out our traditions, but it does mean our focus must be in re-inventing them to communicate and connect with the changing world of our neighborhoods.

### Explaining MBiN

- God is Active
- God has already gifted people in our churches
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- Globalization
- Staying current with our communities



## Coaching TIPS

Our experience in running *Moving Back into the Neighborhood* workshops across the country is that people can bring with them some attitudes and values that can easily become barriers for doing this work.

In this section we've listed some of them for you and provided some responses you might want to use.

Again, your job is to assess the potential attitudes and values your people might bring to this discussion and develop some ways of helping them understand what *MBiN* is all about.

Pick and choose or create information sheets you can use as needed. Be creative and let us know what's helpful and what we can further develop.

# Some Barriers to Consider

## 1. Seeing Our Neighborhoods as a Potential Market

It's easy to view what we're doing in this *Workbook* as a new strategy to market our church, and hence, cause it to grow. A story might illustrate this. Over the past several years, one church created a ministry project involving a fundraising event called Second Wind. The project came out of a desire in the church to do something about suicide prevention among youth in their community. The idea involved a weekend run-and-walk as a fundraiser. The first event brought the church together with the energy to do something for others. The weekend event grew over several years to where several thousand people from the community got involved. An interesting sidebar of this church project was a comment and question by a church member. In a conversation about the church's place in its neighborhood, he commented: "This is a wonderful project that takes a lot of work to pull off. There are a lot of people from the community involved. It's great to do, but some of us have been wondering lately... why none of these people who get involved turn up in church on Sunday?" Behind the question was a sense of confusion: Why don't people come when they can see what great people are in this church? The assumption behind the question is a default way of thinking about mission and ministry. The question suggests the program is a tactic for marketing and church growth.

## 2. Programmatic Focus

When we introduce these principles in workshops, people feel disoriented and ask: But what about the church? They usually mean the church building they drive to on a weekly basis for services and programs or the small groups they drive to in the home of another church member or in some coffee shop off a main highway. Church is really, really important. Everything in this *Workbook* comes out of a deep commitment to the church and especially a local church. However, there's something terribly wrong with our churches; they've become like drive-ins where people who are all alike come to consume the kinds of religious goods and services that suit their spiritual taste buds. Our churches have become places radically disconnected from people in the neighborhoods and communities where we live. How can we faithfully live into Jesus' commandment to love the Lord and our neighbor as ourselves if we never have time to connect with our neighbor? Something has to change. This change is not about structures, organization or programs. What has to change is the way we understand and practice being God's people. *MBiN* is how we can listen

again to the people of our communities and ask what God is up to in our neighborhoods. We need to be forming our churches around what God is doing out there already in our neighborhoods.

### 3. Idealism

Idealism is a very big barrier in many of our churches. There are lots of discussions about how the church needs to change. It does! There is no doubt about that, but what does it mean? What often happens is that pastors or Church Boards look for some ideal understanding of what the church is supposed to be, and then they present to the congregation some program or plan that will turn them into these romantic ideals about what the church should be. Some leaders want to go back to the 'original' or 'essential' or 'pure' New Testament church and make it the benchmark of what their local church needs to look like. Others want to point to some time in church history that is particularly special to them and set it out as the ideal toward which the church should aim. All these proposals have their idealized, romantic 'oughts' about what the 'true' or 'real' church needs to look like. The implication is that your local church needs to look like this ideal. One should be suspicious of this romantic idealism. What it does is tell the people of a local church that the Spirit is really not at work amongst them in terms of the imagination to shape ways of being on mission in their communities; rather, it's about learning to copy what the Spirit did among the really 'spiritual' somewhere else. This idealism and romanticism has more to do with a need for power and control than asking what God is up to in the world.

### 4. Modern Fragmentation

Modern fragmentation teaches that we need to choose between our church's inward life and outward focus. This way of framing issues loses the whole point of the two great commandments – that they are mutually interdependent. The commandments are about learning to love God together (it is always a social project) and learning to follow God's love for the world into the neighborhoods. This is the core of the gospel. One of the discussions going on just now is the contention that we have to create what are called outwardly-focused churches. The idea is that the problem we have to solve is that churches are too inwardly focused, so the solution is to make them become *outwardly* focused. This false polarity only results in techniques that try to get people to give more attention 'outside' and misses the point. We are already in our neighborhoods; the barrier is that we too often don't know how to attend to what God is up to in our neighborhoods and we don't have practices for joining God in our community. This barrier is seen in the ways we use language. It is fairly easy for us to make sense of phrases like 'spiritual practices' (prayer, for example) or actions

#### Barriers to Consider

1. Seeing our Neighborhoods as Potential Markets
2. Programmatic Focus
3. Idealism
4. Modern Fragmentation
5. Unlearning Habits to see with Fresh Eyes

like joining a small group; but, when we talk about practices of asking what God is up to in our neighborhoods, it sounds strange to us. One of the reasons for this barrier is that we have been socialized to believe God works inside the church and in 'spiritual' things we do privately, such as prayer.

## 5. Unlearning Habits to see with Fresh Eyes

A while ago we moved into a new house. It wasn't a big move, just about a mile in distance across the Capilano River from North Vancouver into West Vancouver. Dividing the two cities stands Lions Gate Bridge that takes one across the Burrard Inlet into downtown Vancouver. Heading onto the North Shore, drivers turn right into North Vancouver or left into West Vancouver. For fifteen years we lived in North Vancouver, and when crossing the bridge, we automatically turned right to go home. You can guess the number of times during this past year, when returning from the airport late at night, I automatically turned right instead of left to get home. This is how defaults work. Defaults are automatic responses we do out of habit because we've acted that way so many times, for so long, that we don't need to think about them any longer. Defaults make life work. However they can also blind us to assumptions we might need to rethink in this strange, new place where we find ourselves as churches. It's as if we've been turning right all our lives and now we learn that we're going to need to turn left.

# 2. Preparing



## Time Frame

This preparatory part can take anywhere from **3 - 6 months** depending on the readiness and acceptance of your Board and leadership. This is about building understanding and ownership, which will be very important to the work done in the later part of the *Workbook*. Laying a good groundwork now will pay dividends in terms of ownership and change later.



## Personal Journal Questions

# Communicating with Board and Church

This part is designed to provide the resources and steps that will be required for a church leader to invite the Board to support *MBiN* as well as identify and prepare several teams in the congregation to start the process.

## Actions

Take the following steps in order to prepare for the *MBiN* process.

1. Introduce *MBiN* to the Board and staff so they understand what's it about and how the church can be involved.
2. Plan occasions to teach and study the concept of *MBiN* for your Board and interested groups of people in the church.
3. Prepare a communications strategy for a) key leaders and b) the church as a whole, in order to gain support and set the stage for identifying those who want to be involved.

## Resources

### Personal Journal

As you prepare to introduce and communicate the *MBiN* process, use a notebook to reflect on your responses to the following questions. Think of several people in your church asking you these questions and make notes on how you would quickly and simply communicate with them.

- What does it mean to 'move back into the neighborhood'?
- Why is it important?
- What are the benefits for our church?

### RMN Website Resources

The following are some additional resources available for leaders and congregations as they prepare and move through the *MBiN* process. Visit [www.roxburghmissionalnet.com](http://www.roxburghmissionalnet.com) for more information.

- *MBiN Workshop*. You can schedule a one-day workshop for your church leaders or the whole church as a way of introducing this process.
- *MBiN Webinar* offers regular or as-needed coaching and support during your *MBiN* process.
- *MBiN Videos* are resources listed in *Part 5: Resources* and found at the *MBiN Group* on the RMN Vimeo Channel.

# Developing Ownership

If you are in some form of leadership in your local church, starting well is critical to *MBiN* long-term success. It's important to determine how to use this *Workbook* effectively. Ensure there is well-planned, adequate communication across the church about what's involved and take the time to develop a good communication strategy that will assure buy-in from the church's leadership. In order to prepare of this communication, think through the following questions:

1. As I familiarize myself with the steps outlined in the *Workbook*, what are some key ways it can be introduced to the church?
  - a. What video clips will be most helpful?
  - b. Are there brief interviews or stories that will help people catch the idea?
  - c. How can I give people simple, concrete statements about the benefits to us as a church?
2. What questions might people ask?
3. What basic information needs to be communicated to the Board about the *Workbook* and the process?
4. How will this information be communicated so that leaders will understand it in simple, plain terms, in order to affirm the development of some teams?
5. What questions might leaders ask?
6. What information will they need to give their assent?
7. What might be the points of resistance that will get raised?
8. How might these be addressed in ways that lower anxiety?
9. How will you show people the benefits of using this *Workbook* in terms of what it might do in and for the ministry of the church?
10. What basic information needs to be communicated to the church?
11. When would that happen? In what form? Who will do it?
12. Identify other questions you think will arise.



## Coaching TIPS

Take some time to think through the questions provided to the left in order to prepare for the necessary communication process.

## Board and Staff Understanding and Ownership

How will you introduce the idea of *MBiN* and this *Workbook* to the church's leadership? Here are some ideas for your consideration. Every church is different, so there won't be a single template for doing this. You will need to work with the questions above in order to determine which of these resources will work best and where to use them. Involve the Board from the beginning. Boards hate surprises and need time to process new information. They need to be brought in at the beginning.



### Coaching TIPS

What follows are suggestions for doing this with the leadership Board and the church as a whole. You may not want to use all these ideas and resources; but as you reflect on the questions above, look at how these resources might assist you in starting well.



### Videos

If you are unfamiliar with the **Missional Change Model** or the place of experimenting as a primary method of innovation, we recommend you use the video resource *Understanding the Missional Change Model and its Use in Your Church in the MBiN Group* on Vimeo.

1. Check out where there might be a *MBiN* Workshop in your region and invite members of the leadership to attend. You can see what is available through the RMN website or submit a request for one in your area.
2. Introduce the concept of *MBiN* by showing a selection from the following the video clips:
  - *Reaching a New Generation - Revisited*
  - *Introducing You to 'Moving Back into the Neighborhood'*
  - *The Howard Lawrence Interview*
  - *Simon Carey Holt: God Next Door - Parts 1-5.*
3. Have copies of this *Workbook* available to share with other leaders so they can connect with some of the basic features and intended results.
4. Provide copies of *Introducing the Missional Church* by Roxburgh and Boren (Baker 2009) to key leaders as a primer in missional church. Have them read it as a precursor to introducing *MBiN*.
5. Propose that the leadership set a date for a *MBiN Webinar* where Board and staff can connect for a one-hour information and conversation meeting on-line with an RMN staff person.
6. Learn to use the language of experiments when communicating this material with the Board. This is a critical step in gaining Board approval and lowering any levels of anxiety about what this will mean for the church. Assure the Board that existing programs and ministries will continue as usual and not be affected by this experiment.
7. The *Workbook* introduces your church to a process of innovation based on the *Missional Change Model* and learning to experiment together. It is really an experiment in learning how the church might connect with the neighborhoods and communities where people live in order to assess how God might be calling the church into mission.

8. Develop a simple outline schedule for the leadership to see and work with. Invite them to work with you in amending the schedule, as well as determining the best ways of communicating with the church.
9. Show the Board how the teams will bring reports to the Board with recommended actions for next steps in the church so that the Board will be inside the process of discernment.

## Communication with the Church

You want to create a climate of invitation and conversation, so that people feel welcomed into a process. Don't just announce decisions or pass out information, then expect buy in. Work at building ownership rather than top-down decision-making. Keep people informed. Let them know what you're up to; provide a rationale that helps them understand what it means to be God's people in the neighborhood. This might involve such things as:

1. Teaching and conversations with people in the church about the process in terms of:
  - What does it mean to move back into the neighborhood?
  - Why it is important?
  - What are the benefits to the local church?
2. Identify people who can tell brief stories about being present in their neighborhood. Provide multiple times for this sharing of stories.
3. Invite input and responses as you practice listening to the people of your church.
4. Use Biblical texts in your preaching around the metaphor of neighbor; for example, the Parable of the Good Samaritan as well as Luke 10: 1 - 12.
5. Set up a brief communications workshop so that any who would like more information or want to ask questions can do that. You'll be surprised at the people in a local church who know the neighborhood really well and want to make connections for you. The more of this kind of involvement that gets created in the church, the greater your learning, the richer the discoveries, and the more ownership.



### Coaching TIPS

Don't just announce decisions or pass out information, then expect buy in. **Work at building ownership** rather than top-down decision-making.



## Personal Journal Questions

### Personal Journal

The *Personal Journal* is designed to help you reflect on what your learning about the process as well as keep a record of what you need to do and what is happening. We strongly recommend you keep this journal as part of your own leadership learning.

1. Outline of the first meeting with the Board
2. Write a list of the potential benefits to the church.
3. Create a list of anticipated questions and/or concerns.
4. Name the potential points of resistance and describe how you might respond.
5. List the resources needed.
6. What are the names of potential people to invite to an information meeting?
7. Create a list of the best ways for communicating with the congregation over next few months.

# Suggested Meeting Outlines

## First Meeting: Information Meeting for all Interested People

Plan to meet in a warm, welcoming, comfortable environment where people can sit in relaxed spaces. Since this is about *MBiN*, look at the option of finding a space in the community rather than the church building. This communicates what we want to do. If you meet in the church building, avoid spaces like the sanctuary with pews or rows of chairs. What you want to create here is an environment that connects with the idea of asking what God is up to in our communities. This is not saying church buildings are wrong, just that they have become very familiar to people and so don't always communicate the sense of neighborhood and being in the community.

Make sure good coffee and/or tea and drinks are available. Neighborhood is about hospitality so this is a good place to model that. Work at moving away from the usual church-hall approach with white powder for coffee creamer, etc. Use real cream in nice serving dishes so people experience welcome and hospitality.

### Agenda

Check what you need available for the evening, things such as:

- Video projector
- Screen
- White board or newsprint
- Markers that work.
- Have name-tags available
- Arrive early, set up and check that everything is working.

### Leading the Meeting

- a. Welcome people to the event briefly and open in prayer
- b. Provide a brief overview of the evening stating what you want to achieve, i.e., what are the desired outcomes.
- c. Begin every meeting, with *Dwelling in the Word*. See *Part 5: Resources* for specific instructions in the dwelling process.
- d. Share the basic information people will need:
  - A simple description of what *MBiN* is about.
  - Several brief stories from people about engaging their neighborhoods; share a story of your own.



### Coaching TIPS

Set a date for an information meeting open to anyone interested in getting more information and/or to consider being part of the team in his or her neighborhood. This meeting should be no more than 90 minutes. Design a simple schedule of the time. Being well prepared and well organized will create confidence, heightening the readiness of people to join an experiment.



### Dwelling in the Word

### **Introducing the *Workbook***

- Allow time for dialogue and questions.
- Don't push for decisions.
- Invite people to take time to think and pray.
- Give people an easy way to respond.

- What is meant by neighborhood - not just around the church, but where you live and work.
  - Use one or two of the videos that worked well with the Board.
  - Why neighborhood is important
  - Explain why this is a way to discern what God may be calling us to in our neighborhoods, and why it is important to the church.
  - Not a new program and there will be no program changes.
  - Overview of the process: how often people will meet and how long this will take. Have this information outlined in a one-page information sheet.
  - Have the *Workbook* available for people to look at.
- e. Allow lots of time for dialogue and questions. Make sure people feel there is a lot of time for conversation. Let people get together in small groups and ask them to share a simple story that would help others get a sense of their neighborhood.
- f. Make sure you don't push for decisions at this information event. Continue to emphasize that this is an experiment and that you're looking for two or three teams in neighborhood areas. You are looking for any who would like to participate. So this is a chance for people to listen, ask questions, then go away to pray and discern.
- g. Ask people to take some time to think and pray about being involved. Let them know you will be available to talk with people if they want more information and would be happy to meet with them for conversation. Suggest people take two weeks to consider the invitation to be part of a *MBiN* Team. Indicate that when people decide there will be a training evening to begin the process and that you will walk with the teams through the process.
- h. Provide people with an easy way of responding to the evening. Set the date for the next meeting (about two weeks on) and give out a one-page response form with the following elements: see the following sample.

# Moving Back into the Neighborhood

## Information Response Form

Thank you for attending our information event on *Moving Back Into the Neighborhood*. We encourage you to reflect on this opportunity and to prayerfully consider if you would like to participate. This is a small experiment that will help us understand our Christian mission more fully.

Name:

.....

Address:

.....

Telephone Number:

.....

Thanks for the information. I am interested in this experiment but don't have the time at this point. Please keep me informed.

I am interest and want to attend the next training event in order to make a decision.

Please sign me on. I want to be a part of this experiment in my neighborhood.

Please feel free to share any comments or reflections that might be helpful as we move forward.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## Between Meetings

Following the information meeting, find some time to note all those who attended. Begin looking at where there might be the potential for two or three clusters of teams in a few neighborhoods. You don't want too many teams (three at the most) because this is an experiment, and as such, you want to give the first round (where we make all our mistakes) something of a low profile. You don't want to make a big splash about it all. You want to keep people generally informed as the regular life of the church continues forward. If you create too many teams, this will create a time and management issue that will take away from the regular, expected tasks of ministry. For the first round, go small.

You will probably want to note people with whom you will personally follow up, listening to their responses, letting them ask questions and making a personal invitation for them to join the process.

### Consider your own role in this experiment

Leadership is about modeling where the church could be innovative and creative in mission. As a leader in the church, you don't want to lead one of these teams. However, it will be important for you to be a member of a team showing your own investment in your neighborhood. Look at where you live, begin asking how you can move back into the neighborhood and ask who else might join with you.

# Agenda for the Second Meeting

Purpose: Give those who've indicated interest a more comprehensive outline of the steps and how they will be involved.

Goal: Create several *MBiN* teams

## Agenda

1. *Dwelling in the Word* – Luke 10: 1-12
2. Walk people through the outline below so people get a sense of what they'll be doing.
3. Provide an outline of the *MBiN* process (found in *Part 5: Resources*) as a handout for people. It summarizes the steps so people can see what will be involved.
4. Allow for discussion and questions of the outline to ensure people understand the process.
5. Identify the teams that this will involve:
  - 5 – 8 people living in a common community, perhaps within a half-mile radius of one another.
  - Commitment to meet on regular basis (every other week for a period of 6-8 months).
  - The *Workbook* will guide the work of each meeting and how groups plan for what they will be doing between meetings.
6. Describe the support mechanisms for each group:
  - The pastor, and or designated staff/Board members who will stay in regular touch with each group
  - They are available to assist and resource them in the process.
7. Set date for beginning.
8. Develop agreement on communication to the congregation about the teams, when they start and what they will be doing.
9. Discuss ways of praying for and supporting each other.



**Dwelling in  
the Word**



## Helpful Reading

Here is a list of books that provide useful background. It would be a good investment to have some of these books on hand for people to look over and come back to from time to time.

Arbuckle, Gerry A. *Earthing the Gospel: An Inculturation Handbook for the Pastoral Worker* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990).

Carey Holt, Simon. *God Next Door* (Acorn Press, East Brunswick, 2007).

Branson, Mark Lau. *Memories, Hopes and Conversations* (Herdon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004).

Evans, David & Fearon, Mike. *From Strangers to Neighbours: How You Can Make the Difference in Your Community* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998).

Gorringer T. J. *The Theology of the Built Environment: Justice, Empowerment, Redemption* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Jacobson, Eric O. *Sidewalks of the Kingdom: New Urbanism and the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003).

Roxburgh, Alan J. *Reaching a New Generation* (Regent College Publishing, 2003).

*The Sky is Falling* (RMN Resources).

*Missional Mapmaking* (Jossey-Bass, 2010).

Roxburgh and Romanuk. *The Missional Leader* (Jossey-Bass, 2006).

Roxburgh and Boren. *Introducing the Missional Church* (Baker, 2009).

Sedmak, Clemens. *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002).

Vanhoozer, Kevin J. (Editor). *Everyday Theology: How to read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

# 3. Action Steps



## Time Frame

The following outline of Steps 1-6 will take approximately **6 months** for a group to work through.

# 1. Reading your Neighborhood

... *I see men, but they look like trees, walking ... Mark 8:24*

*MBiN* is about learning to see your community with a fresh set of eyes and listening with newly tuned ears. How might you become detectives of God's life among your neighbors and among the activities of the streets where you live? The practices described below will prepare you to be surprised by the Spirit.

In this part you will:

- *Dwelling in the Word* together using Luke 10: 1-12.
- **New Eyes:** Look at what it might mean for you to develop a way of seeing your neighborhood the way God might see it.
- **New Ears:** Discover what it means to become attentive to the stories of people in your neighborhood and creating a safe space for stories to be told.
- Learn an initial exercise of walking about your neighborhood at different times of the day and noting what you are seeing.

## A. New Eyes

... *I see men, but they look like trees, walking ... Mark 8:24*

Mark's Gospel tells the story of a blind man who begs Jesus to touch him so that he might see. Jesus takes him aside, touches his eyes and asks if he can see. The man's words have become famous: "*I see people; they look like trees walking around*". Jesus touched him again and his 'eyes were opened, his sight restored, and he saw everything clearly." While this story functions at many levels it is an action parable suggesting that we can come to the place where we have an inability to see what is in front of us. It is a parable about how we sometimes need to be touched again so that what we have come to see as just the ordinary becomes the place where God is at work before our eyes.

*MBiN* can be about this kind of journey. What we want to do in this Workbook is really quite simple, but takes quite a bit of effort. We want to learn together how to see our neighborhoods with fresh eyes in order to ask the question: *What is God up to in our neighborhood and how might we join with God right where we live?* We sometimes get the wrong impression about what God is interested in and where God works in the world. Some of us may think the work of God is for those great, heroic men and women who decide to give up all they have, move across oceans to strange worlds and work amongst people with strange names and lan-

guages. When these kinds of perspectives get into our imaginations we tend to see our neighborhoods as just mundane places where we live but not much more. But what if God is just as interested and passionate about your neighborhood? What if, in fact, God is so committed to your neighborhood that God is already ahead of you up to something in the neighborhood, desiring that you would have the eyes to see and the heart to join? What if God's work and amazing future is going on right now in your neighborhood? How would you see this? What might it look like? How would you know if God had moved into your neighborhood?

This learning to see with fresh eyes is also about becoming attentive to what is around us when we easily come to take things for granted because they are just always there. The author, Clemens Sedmak, talks about this as waking up. To explain, he presents a quote from the famous Brazilian educator Paulo Freire:

*We wake up, take our morning showers, leave home for work. We run into people we know and people we don't know. We obey traffic lights: if they are green, we cross streets; if they are red, we stop to wait. We do all this without ever once asking ourselves why we do it.*

Paulo Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers* (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, 1998, 77)

*MBiN* is about learning to see with fresh eyes; it is about seeing neighbors rather than trees. It is about waking up to the amazing things the Spirit is up to among the people of your community to which you might have been asleep. How do we go about doing this? Sometimes simple stories give us clues. One evening in the summer I was working in San Diego over a weekend. It had been a busy weekend and I was looking forward to heading home Sunday afternoon and retreating into my home with Jane. When I called her she told me that one of our neighbors had invited us over for a street barbeque. I drove home to join the neighbors and enjoy a great BBQ and relaxed conversation. Jane and I talked afterwards about how great it was to have easy conversations with these new friends and, in so doing, start to see them with fresh eyes. It's not complicated but it is about learning to see ourselves as well as our neighbors with fresh and new eyes.

What are some of the reasons for this?

#### **Steps 1-6**

##### **1. Reading your Neighborhood**

2. The Gospel and your Neighbor
3. Mapping your Neighborhood
4. Attending to Stories
5. Discerning
6. Experimenting



## Videos

Remember to read **Simon Carey Holt's** book *The God Next Door* and view the five part series of interviews with him at <http://vimeo.com/groups/mbin>.

## What is Waking up about?

Clemens Sedmak, a student of neighborhoods and God's Word, lives in Europe. He wrote a little book called *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity*.

Don't be alarmed by the word theology in the title; it isn't as bad and daunting as we've been led to believe. Doing "local theology," is simply about asking the question: What is God up to in the neighborhoods where we live as members of a Christian community? That's what theology means in this *Workbook*. Theology isn't about big words, abstract questions or books filled with language that requires a library of dictionaries to decode.

This simple conviction that theology is asking the question: "What's God up to among the neighborhoods where we live as members of a Christian community?" is based on a conviction. The God who has come to us in Jesus is already at work in your neighborhood where you live out your regular, daily life. Think of the amazing description of God coming to us given right at the beginning of John's Gospel: "And the Word became flesh and pitched his tent beside ours." Someone else put it this way: "God moved in, right next door to us."

Think about this for a moment.

Turn to the part of John 1 and read it out loud several times. The technical word used for what is happening here is *Incarnation*; however, let's not get caught with just technical language that can easily seem out of focus because it feels abstract or too strange for us to understand. The radical message of this passage in John is that God comes to us and comes to us in the midst of the ordinary and everyday things of our life.

That is what is so amazing about the Gospel!

In Jesus' time the phrase "*pitched his tent*" expresses the idea of tenting which is not about vacations in the wilderness but coming and joining in the ordinariness of our everyday lives. Working, eating, sleeping and being a family would all happen in the same place in the midst of a local town or village.

Where, therefore, is God found? Have you ever noticed that somehow we've managed to turn God's presence into special places (church buildings) or the domain of special people (ministers, missionaries or 'spiritual' people – which usually means not like us) or special times (when we pray or go on a retreat or commit ourselves to something). Does it ever cross your mind that when we think about where we find God most of the time it has to do

with what we might call 'inwardness', that is, usually only inside our private, personal, inner selves? These are some of the reasons why most of us no longer 'see' God in the neighborhood. We've been shaped to see God only in special places and among special people. However, from the beginning, this has never been the way God comes to us. Reread the birth narratives of Jesus. They are all about the fact that God comes right in the midst of the ordinary. They are about the fact that the God of our story always turns up in the most unexpected places – like the neighborhood rather than the palace or seminary or cathedral or some special, so-called 'holy' place. This is the amazing thing about the way the God of Jesus is at work. Most of the time we are closed off to this imagination, almost blind to the most obvious and clearest way in which God turns up. We've bound God up in the confines of a church building or the intimacy of our private experience or the weekly small group meetings with other Christians while God is out there ahead of us in our neighborhoods as the *God Next Door*.

The conviction of this *Workbook* is that this is exactly the place where God is at work through the Spirit in the name of Jesus. This is such a simple fact but we've lost sight of it in all the ideas and teaching we're given in church that seems so disconnected from the everyday life of the people in our neighborhood. Theology is all about seeing our communities and our neighborhoods as the places where God is already at work.

Too many of us have been hood-winked into believing that the primary place where God is at work is in a place called *church*. This is the place we go and find special people (usually identified by some title such as *pastor, reverend, priest, father, etc*) who really do know what God is up to because they were trained and ordained to do so. Theology is fine for those special people, but not something the rest of us can understand.

These assumptions are misguided. They have little to do with the Jesus we encounter in Scripture. Jesus is shown to us in the ordinariness of birth, family, place and time. In Jesus, God is always turning up in the ordinariness of the everyday, the local and the regular rhythms of life. Have you noticed the stories Jesus told about who God is and how we know God? These are stories about a woman cleaning her house, a man plowing a field, someone walking from one place to the next, and people who are just hungry and want some food.

Make a list of the stories Jesus uses and see how ordinary and everyday they are. Look at how *non-spiritual* most of them are by our categories of spiritual. It's amazing how the Bible keeps showing us that God is discovered in the ordinary and the local. The problem is that most of us have been habituated to think we can't do

The conviction of this *Workbook* is that our neighborhoods are exactly the place where God is at work through the Spirit in the name of Jesus.

#### **Steps 1-6**

##### **1. Reading your Neighborhood**

2. The Gospel and your Neighbor
3. Mapping your Neighborhood
4. Attending to Stories
5. Discerning
6. Experimenting

theology, because we haven't been trained in a special way of knowing. As a result, we're basically closed off from the sense that God is up to something among us in the ordinariness of our neighborhoods. We've have fallen asleep and don't see the places where God is at work. Sedmak asks some wonderful questions we can use to practice waking up and helping each other 'see' in order to change the situation. Over the next few weeks try responding to them in your notebooks and share your responses with one another.



### Personal Journal Questions

## Personal Journal Questions

As you walk through the neighborhood, respond to some of the following questions in your *Personal Journal*, and be prepared for the Spirit to surprise you!

1. Where are you asleep and unaware?
2. How can you create safe space for others?
3. Where are you waking up to your neighborhood?
4. Where are you (you and your local church)?
5. Where might you be asleep, missing or taking for granted your community?
6. Where might you just miss the opportunity of being surprised by what God wants to show you about your neighborhood?



### Group Work

## Group Work

Always begin your group meetings with *Dwelling in the Word*.

As you meet weekly or bi-weekly use your *Personal Journal* to share each of your responses to these questions. It will take more than a single meeting to listen well to one another.

Discuss together what you are experiencing and learning through these neighborhood exercises.

Pray together for the people you have named in your neighborhood. These can be simple prayers of blessing upon them and their homes.

## Group Exercise

1. Without asking someone else, can you provide the first and last names of the people who live beside (above and below) you in this area?
2. What can you describe about their lives that can only be known from inside the door of their home?
3. What are some of the God-shaping longings and/or questions that currently shape their lives?

Neighborhoods differ greatly in terms of their physical design, such as, single-family dwellings, high-rise or town house communities, denser urban settings or mixed housing developments. Below are several images depicting these differing forms of living. Each suggests differing ways of relating to the people; they also carry different kinds of opportunities and barriers to connecting with people.

Choose the image that best characterizes your neighborhood and use it to engage the following set of questions. Remember, these questions are designed for you to work with throughout your time together as a group in this process. They are not 'tasks' to be done and ticked off a list but an invitation to imagine ways you might develop practices of asking what God is up to in your neighborhood.

Using the images to the right, identify the image best describing the community in which you live.



### Steps 1-6

#### 1. Reading your Neighborhood

2. The Gospel and your Neighbor
3. Mapping your Neighborhood
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5. Discerning
6. Experimenting

## B. New Ears

### Listening to the stories of your Neighborhood

The adventure God is calling you into is about becoming attentive to the stories of the people in your neighborhood. A local theologian is a newspaper reporter gathering the stories of people, like a local detective looking about for the signs of God's presence. You are learning to be attentive and listen.

How do you wake up to the wonderful, amazing stories of the people in your neighborhood? In these stories the Spirit is shaping things we could never have imagined. It will take time to develop the comfort and skills for this listening and reporting. It's a wonderful gift to the neighborhood and an amazing way to start seeing what God is up to.

Let's be clear about what we do and do not mean here. This is not about coming up with an evangelism plan. You are not going to be asked to assess people on some scale of receptivity to God. On the contrary, we want you to learn how to create a safe, welcoming presence that invites your neighbors to share their stories. People only share their stories when they sense a space where they are welcomed and the other person doesn't have an agenda to make them into something or sell them something. This is what we will call a safe space.

### Creating Safe Spaces

We create safe space as we welcome people without preconceived agendas or objectives. In the church world, the people in our neighborhoods are often considered 'out there' (prospects for evangelism or membership, for example). When that is the objective, we've already turned our neighbor into an object of some end, such as getting him/her to church. We may want this to be a good purpose but it's not where we begin. When people feel we have something to sell or we want them to do something, then they automatically feel it's not a safe space and won't share their stories.

People hunger to find others who will listen to them and hear their stories. We believe that inside people's stories are clues as to what God is up to in the neighborhood and how we can join with God in what the Spirit may want to do.

Our communities are increasingly comprised of people with real differences from one another. Our conviction is that a local church is called and sent to be God's presence with, for, beside, and in our neighborhoods. A bias is built into this conviction. Just as the Incarnation shows us that God chose to be known through a specific

place and time with a particular history and identity, so the followers of Jesus can only be the church as they *pitch their tents* among the people with whom they live and work and play.

This challenges our drive-to-church mentality. These drive-to churches occupy people (whole families) traveling many miles to get to the church that *meets their particular needs*. One leader described a church where members drive up to seventy miles on a Sunday to attend the worship service. This is an extreme instance of what is the norm for suburban Christians, namely, they drive out of the neighborhood, across stretches of roadway to some other place to receive the religious goods and services designed to meet their personal needs. This now-common form of Christian life disconnects us from our neighborhoods.

In Philippians chapters 1-2, Jesus is described as entering our experience (the local, ordinary contexts of everyday life) to become like us. The Prologue to John's Gospel (1: 1-14) has that haunting metaphor describing how the Word came and *pitched his tent right* beside ours. God moved right into the suburban neighborhood and stayed there. The birth narratives proclaim, amazingly, the humanity of Jesus, not his divinity as many assume. These stories communicate the startling fact that the God of creation entered right into the utter ordinariness of the local and particular in a specific place, among such ordinary and unexceptional people, coming without power, control or any expectation that his needs were the primary objective of his life. Indeed, for any with even a remote understanding of the biblical imagery, he came as a stranger. God came as a stranger, and in the biblical imagination, the most vulnerable of persons who comes without claim.

*"... do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves...look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2: 2-4).*

In Philippians 2:2-5, the focus and priority of local churches is not on their own needs or expectations, but how to shape their lives around the other, the non-member, those persons outside the church's context. These passages help us see that the local is the place where God is present and at work. This is about the neighborhood, about those across the street and around the corner. While we already live in neighborhoods, we need to re-orient church life in ways that will assist us to see our neighborhoods as the real centers of God's activity. Part of what this involves is learning the spiritual practice or really seeing the 'other'.

#### **Steps 1-6**

##### **1. Reading your Neighborhood**

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## Really seeing the 'other' – developing new practices

This seeing the other – becoming a local theologian – invites us to cultivate habits of life we may have forgotten or not thought about as Christian or spiritual practices. One such practice is that of listening to the other, learning to welcome and receive another in the name of Jesus. This is how God welcomed and reached out to us in Jesus. Welcoming the other (who may be a neighbor across the street but be a stranger to us) is one of the most basic acts of God's people in the Scriptures. As God's people, we live in our neighborhoods to welcome and receive the other, the stranger, just as God in Jesus has done.

A local church, therefore, lives not for itself but for the 'other' and the 'stranger' in our communities where God is already present. The people in our communities are to shape the focus, concerns and ethos of a local church. This is what makes a local church incarnational. Structures, worship, leadership, programs and philosophy are to be shaped around this overriding focus that has always been at the core of all movements of God's people. This doesn't mean our theology and tradition or the message of the Gospel are co-opted by the values of the social context. Nor does it mean we simply try to please everyone's whims, needs, perspectives or values. It means that our theologies, traditions and Gospel practices are formed out of indwelling the local context to discern what God is up to.

For this to happen, people of a local church need to learn how to listen to their neighbors and see their communities with God's ears and eyes. This is the way of Jesus. For the majority of us, this requires learning new skills where *we pitch our tents* and enter the life of the local.

## Listening rather than concluding

The skill of waking up and seeing what is about us has to do with how we practice listening and watching. We emphasize the practices of prayer, Bible study, giving, etc., but there are also practices of listening and seeing what God is up to in our neighborhoods.

You will soon learn about a young mom who practiced being present long enough to hear the stories of moms in her community. If we begin with our plans, we miss being surprised by what God wants to show us in the neighborhood.

## Personal Journal Questions

1. Make a regular habit of walking around your neighborhood (two to three times a week) at different times of the day and in different directions. Jot down what you're seeing and hearing. It is important to do this regularly and at different times of the day to see how different people are present and how they shape the neighborhood. Here are some examples from this kind of observing:
  - Early in the morning you might see a group of runners jogging together.
  - If you are up early, you might catch the homeless packing their borrowed grocery carts, readying to make their rounds of stores and missions.
  - Sunrise and several young, Filipina, Black or Hispanic nannies get off buses to care for children all day.
  - Mid morning in the suburban neighborhood – all the cars have disappeared. It all looks ghost-like with not a person to be seen.
  - Mid-morning – the Molly Maid service goes from house to house
  - Coffee shops are ebb and flow with people; if you wait and watch long enough you may see a few older men who are regulars, sitting alone, trying to make their coffee last as long as possible.
  - Late afternoon – teenagers are at their favorite hang-out talking loudly, pushing one another around and laughing.
  - Late evening – the streets are quiet but you might notice people walking about. Some have dogs but others are...
2. Read the article *"Reading the Everyday"* which can be found referenced in *Part 5: Resources*.
3. Practice this kind of walking around, and see if there are any of these signposts, images and metaphors that might catch the spirit of your neighborhood. After each walk, jot down brief notes to yourself about what you've seen or who've you've talked with that day. This simple act of making notes is one of the ways we learn to 'wake up' to our own community.
4. Continue making brief notes of any simple encounters or incidents with people in the community over the past several months. Here are some questions you can use to help you shape these notes:



### Personal Journal Questions

### Suggested Reading



"Reading the Everyday" can be found at: [http://www.johndavies.org/Reading-Everyday-Third\\_Way.pdf](http://www.johndavies.org/Reading-Everyday-Third_Way.pdf)

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- a) Where am I waking up to my neighborhood? What am I starting to notice for the first time? It may be how people keep their houses or when the folks next door come home or the places where moms gather with their babies on certain days. You may discover seniors gather in certain places or that some houses have things left on the doorsteps (like newspapers) that don't get picked up. Some lawns are well cared for while others never seem to grow anything green. A lot of kids walk to the local school in their jeans and hoodies, while some wear uniforms and are picked up by buses each morning. On and on goes the variety and shifting patterns of your community.
- b) Where might we be asleep? What might your local church be missing or taking for granted in the neighborhood? Often, churches decide on programs to offer the community and spend resources marketing the 'outreach' program to the community (moms, youth or seniors). As you listen to your neighborhood and connect with the rhythms of its everyday life, what are you hearing from the neighborhood itself? What is important? What do they already have for moms, youth and seniors? In one church in Birmingham, UK, some members noticed a lot of young moms walking with their children in the local park. As they sat together on the park benches, one church member joined the conversations. These young moms wanted some good exercise after having their children, but found it difficult with the demands and routines of their babies. The church member, a mom herself, knew something about physical fitness and designed a course, along with hints on how to exercise at different stations on the run. It was a great success!



### Group Work

## Group Work

Continue *Dwelling in the Word* asking how the text is assisting you to read your neighborhood.

Continue to use your *Personal Journal* to share each of your responses to these questions.

Continue to share what you are experiencing and learning through these neighborhood exercises.

Continue to pray for the people you have named in your neighborhood.

## 2. The Gospel and your Neighbor

*"... but who is my neighbor?"*

People ask why we bother with this idea of the neighbor and the neighborhood when so many of us live in what we call a connected world, where we meet friends online or drive miles to meet them in another part of town or across the country. In this part we will:

- Read together the parable of the Good Samaritan in order to ask new questions about who is our neighbor.
- Share with each other what we've been discovering in some of our walking around the neighborhood.
- See if there are any 'first' stories about the neighborhood that we can share with one another.
- Talk about the idea of planning a neighborhood BBQ or something else that might gather people.

### Why is Neighborhood Important?

Why bother with the neighbor and the neighborhood? Most of us just drive in and out of our neighborhoods; we sleep and have meals there once in a while. Surely, there are more important places to live kingdom life in this postmodern world. Isn't the neighborhood just a throwback to some other time? Shouldn't we be focused on the 'now' and the contemporary, rather than these old forms of life? These are some of the responses to moving back into the neighborhood. People claim we live in a connected world where we meet friends online or drive miles to meet them in another part of town or across the country. Isn't neighborhood just a bit passé?

Let's begin by asking about why neighborhood is important to us as Christians in terms of witness and mission. If you ask a random group of people about how many people they know on their street, or in their complex, the answer would probably be similar to the one given by Steve who responded: *I've lived on this street for three and half years and I know the name of a couple of people; that's about it.* This is a big shift from a time not very long ago when people on the same street knew each other quite well, not only by name, but also in terms of common interest and interaction. That's not how we tend to function today. In fact, some argue that in a world of cars, highways, subways, cell phones and the Internet, neighborhood isn't that important anymore and we don't really need to think too much about it in terms of connecting with people. We'll look at some of these attitudes and values as we go through the *Workbook*, but let's look at another story about

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neighbors we probably know quite well.

## Luke 10:25-37

*On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. [31] A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. [32] So, too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. [33] But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. [34] He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. [35] The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."*

## Background to the Passage

This story asks the question: *Who is my neighbor?* It is connected with one of the great commands: You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18). These are very powerful affirmations about the place of neighbor in the Biblical narratives and the place God gives to those identified as *neighbor*. In the Biblical narratives, therefore, who is the neighbor? In the Luke story, a lawyer asked the question (someone schooled in all the refinements of the Torah). What he meant by this term related to fellow Jews, but Jesus tells the story in terms of boundary crossing (the Samaritan). The point here, though, is that the stories make it clear that neighbor was a taken-for-granted category of relationship that described how people in a local community knew each other and understood they had obligations to one another as neighbors. It is true that people in that time lived in much closer proximity to one another and were without the amenities that enable travel to great distances. However, this ability to move around isn't really the issue.

In the Biblical narratives, the neighbor was the person who was before you and lived beside you. This relationship involved obligation. Jesus' reiteration of the command to love one's neighbor as oneself was not a call to sentimentality or to have warm feelings toward one's neighbor, but rather to understand that at the deepest level of human life one is *obligated* to one's neighbor irrespective of who he/she/they may be (like us or very different from us). This is what makes neighbor and neighborhood so important for Gospel life in our day. Our churches become the places where we are urged to make our primary relationships, but they are usually such homogeneous places that we end up with people who look, act, speak and, for all practical purposes, are just like us. When we are called to the vocation of loving - being obligated to - our neighbors, those people across the street, next door and down the street, the chances are that we are encountering all kinds of difference that calls us to cross boundaries. Further, in our culture, individualism is so powerful that we assume it is simply the normal, natural thing to do to look after our own needs first and choose the people with whom we have relationship. This command and the story in Luke 10, however, cuts right across this primary value and claim of modern life.

The command to enter one's neighborhood and love one's neighbor calls us away from our rights to choose and invites us to take on obligation for the other who lives across the street. In the increasingly pluralist and cosmopolitan nature of North America, the call to enter the neighborhood is a radical call to rediscover the Gospel in the other, rather than create churches that are comprised of people who are just like us. The power of the Luke 10 story of the Good Samaritan is that it challenged the social and racial exclusivism that was being practiced. When the lawyer asked Jesus the question of who is my neighbor, he expected the answer, by implication, to be the Jewish people. Jesus breaks this assumption and presents a radical call to cross strong, social boundaries. Today, most of our churches practice something like the assumptions of the lawyer. It may not be something that people would want to espouse or say they believe, but most church communities practice this way of life. They are comprised of people who are their own kind of people in terms of race, economics, socio-cultural values, etc. Most Christians form their friends around these very narrow, confining definitions of relationship and belonging, so that it is very clear who is in and who is out. Jesus makes it clear that those who follow him live by very different values and practices - they form their relationships by crossing boundaries to the other who is not immediately like them and may not believe the same ways as they do (Samaritans). In the places where most North Americans live, we can begin to do this most effectively in our neighborhoods where one of the few

In our culture, individualism is so powerful that we assume it is simply the normal, natural thing to do to look after our own needs first and choose the people with whom we have relationship. But this command and the story in Luke 10 cuts right across this primary value and claim of modern life.

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reasons people do come together is to protect themselves from the stranger and outsider. This is the person, the stranger and outsider, that Scriptures teaches us to welcome and embrace.

Jesus frames the story of the Good Samaritan in a particular way. All his parables are concrete, filled with the sounds, smells and activities of the everyday and the ordinary. A man is walking from one place to another. He is robbed and left beside the road. The point here is that the neighbor is not some ideal type or abstract value, but someone in a concrete, local context. Neighbor and neighborhood are about the ordinary places where we live, and about the people across the street, next door and in the apartments above and below. The neighbor is not an abstract ideal but those we meet in the regular, daily course of our life.

It is a common practice these days for Christians to feel they fulfill their spiritual obligations by serving in rescue missions downtown or going on mission trips to far off places then returning home to the normal rhythm of their lives. Without diminishing the importance of these activities, we must acknowledge that they represent limited, controlled obligations that, in the end, do not interfere with our own individualism, right of choice and freedom to be and do what we choose. In the end, these kinds of activities leave us in control and, therefore, unchanged. The Samaritan understood that the obligation of neighbor was radically different from this. The Samaritan's actions were radically different from our mission trips and rescue mission activities. This man assumed obligations for the other who was radically different and, probably, wasn't going away any time soon. When we connect with the neighborhood in this way, obligation takes on a whole different sense and our values of individual rights and personal choice are relativized before the claim of the other who is our neighbor. Neighborhood is about living our Christian lives with and for those who are right in front of our noses in our everyday life.

## Personal Journal Questions

- Where are the differences in this community?
- Who are the people groups?
- Where did they come from? How long have they been here?
- How is difference dealt with?
- Who's invisible? Why?
- How does communication take place?
- Where is the church being heard (if at all)?
- What are the primary organizations and services? What does this tell you about the area?
- Who are the individuals who connect and bridge in this community?
- What are you learning about your neighborhood?
- Do you have new questions about what is/isn't happening here?
- Where might you get more connected?

## Group Work

- Focus on *Dwelling in the Word*
- Share your *Personal Journal* responses to these questions.
- What you are experiencing about your neighborhood?
- Continue to pray for the people in your neighborhood.



### Personal Journal Questions



### Group Work

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# 3. Mapping your Neighborhood

*"... enter the villages and towns and..."*

As you walk around you start to develop fresh eyes around what might have previously been taken for granted. A helpful way to develop new eyes is by creating 'maps' of your neighborhood and sharing with one another the stories of what you are seeing. This mapping helps you discover what you might not be seeing and create new appreciation for what is actually happening everyday that you miss. It helps you learn to ask new kinds of questions about your community. In this part you will:

- *Dwelling in the Word*: Continue to dwell in the Parable of the Good Samaritan.
- Look at a sample neighborhood 'maps' and talk about how to draw your own (chart paper, whiteboards, bulletin boards, display boards, etc.).
- Share any new kinds of questions you might be developing about your neighborhood.
- Talk about gathering and meeting places in your neighborhood and how you can connect with them.
- Share with each other how you might find ways of learning about some of the stories of people on your street.
- Talk about how you might start practicing hospitality with some of the people on our street.



## Videos

Please watch the video series from Hollywood with Ryan Bell found in the *MBiN Group* on Vimeo: <http://vimeo.com/groups/mbin>.



## Coaching TIPS

You might want to consider using digital pictures of buildings, activities and streets to illustrate your map. This permits more people to make concrete contributions to a group effort.

## Steps 1-6

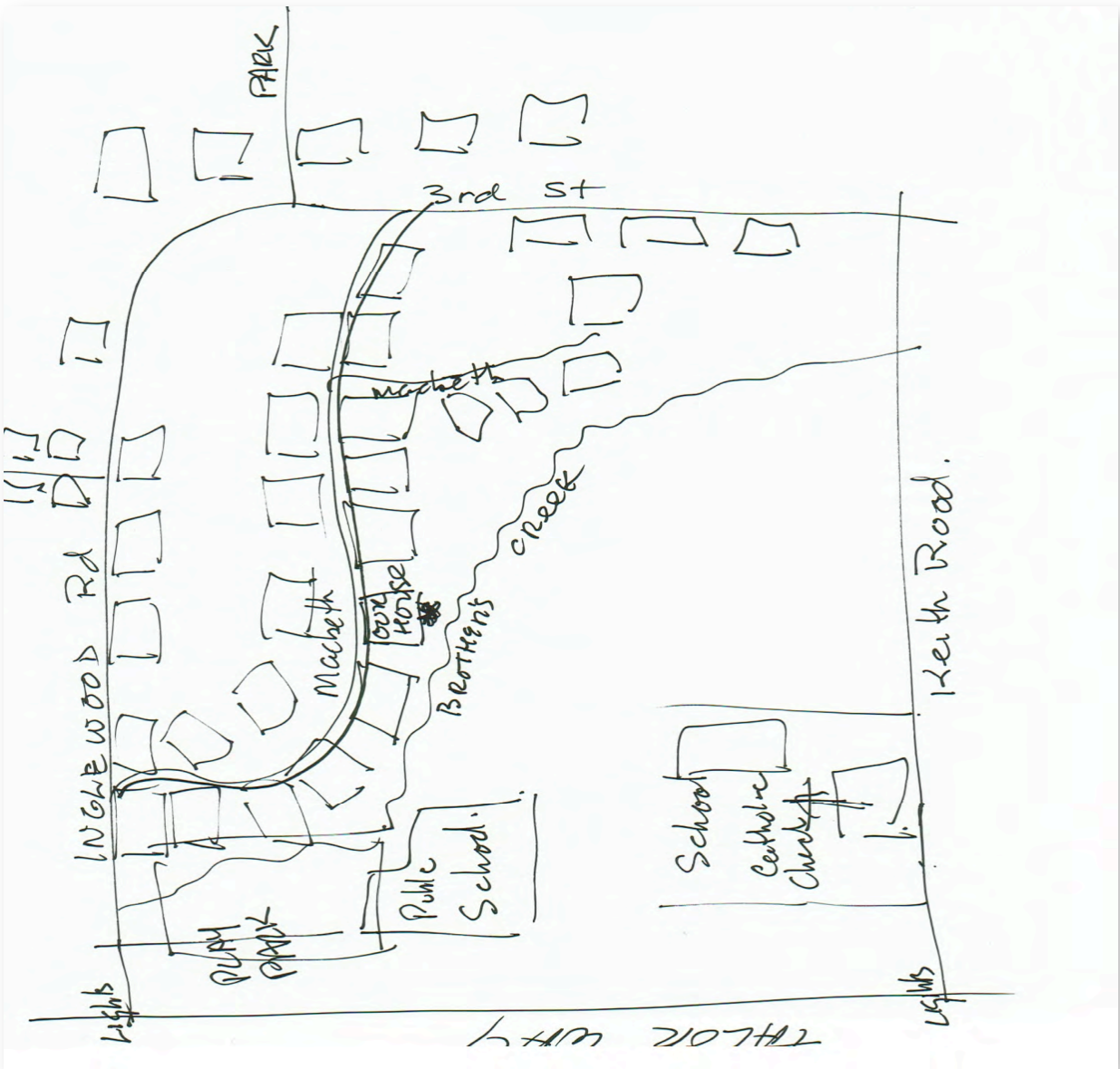
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## Mapping Exercise

This section builds on the work of the past weeks by creating a simple neighborhood 'map' in order to tell stories about the community.

1. Imagine you're in a helicopter looking down on your neighborhood.
2. Draw a sketch of what you see in your mind.
3. What is at the center of your neighborhood? Draw an image of this.
4. Mark the shopping places, parks or schools in the neighborhood.
5. What other landmarks do you want to mark?
6. Are there churches, business buildings, fire or police stations?
7. Mark the gathering places on your map.
8. Mark your favorite place to go in the neighborhood. Consider why you chose this.
9. Mark your least favorite place to go in the neighborhood. Consider why you chose this.
10. List any major boundaries in your neighborhood, for example, geographic features like rivers, forests, mountains or hills, or man-made boundaries like railroad tracks, highways, bridges and freeways.

# Sample Neighborhood Map





### Personal Journal Questions

## Personal Journal Questions

- Name three people you know in the neighborhood and locate where they live on your map.
- What are some of the stories you could tell about people in the neighborhood?
- What three things would you do to make your neighborhood better?



### Group Work

## Group Work

- Begin with *Dwelling in the Word*
- Briefly share some basic responses to the 'Neighborhood Map' exercise and *Personal Journal* response to the questions with each other.
- Pray for the people you have named in your neighborhood.

# 4. Attending to Stories

*"... enter the villages and towns and..."*

How do you listen to the stories of your neighborhood? What is so important about listening to the stories of the people about you and how do you learn to hear what they are saying rather than presuming and concluding? Why is story so critical to knowing what God is doing in a community? These are the questions you will ask to make fresh discoveries about our community.

In this part you will:

- *Dwell in the Word* through Luke 10: 1-12.
- Share your maps with one another.
- Share what you know about the people who live on your street.
- Talk together about how you might find natural ways of attending to the stories of some who live on your street.
- Continue to meet to share with one another the stories and what you are learning about your neighborhood.
- Report on what you are discovering about your neighborhood as you practice hospitality among people on the street.

## Group Work

When you come together as a group after your map-making exercise spend several sessions sharing and talking about the maps each has created. The following is a suggested pattern for doing this work together:

1. As a whole group take about 20 minutes to share with each other your experience in doing the map-making exercise. This is not about sharing details or specific stories, just some of your general impressions and experiences.
2. Divide up into groups of two to share the following:
  - Take 10 minutes and share your map with your partner describing what you drew, what you learned about the neighborhood and where you found yourself struggling to put all the pieces together.
  - Let your partner ask questions to clarify and make sure he/she has heard you.
3. Come back as a whole group.
  - Share your partner's map with the group, giving as faithful as description as possible, of what you heard.



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- Check with the partner to see if there is anything else that needs to be added or 'amended'
  - After each presentation give the group a chance to ask questions for clarity and understanding (at this point you are not looking for comments or interpretations unless the person who created the map asks for this feedback)
  - Switch roles and move around the group in this way.
4. After everyone has shared, brainstorm together what you have learned/discovered about your differing neighborhoods. Jot down your responses using some of these questions as guidelines:
- What is common to the maps?
  - What are the differences?
  - Are there elements emerging that you want to talk about together?
  - Do you get any inkling about what God might be up to in the midst of these neighborhoods and communities?
  - Share any fresh stories that are emerging. Are there places where you might sense you can join or connect in the community?
  - Share together how you will go about listening to and discerning the stories of the people in your community over the coming weeks.

## The Practice of Listening

You have been listening and attending to your neighborhoods and the stories shaping the people around you. Many of these people don't necessarily attend any church and probably aren't interested in driving to where you go to church. If you approach people only from the perspective of them being candidates or recruits for your church we'll miss their stories and, in so doing, miss what God might be up to.

Please don't misunderstand what this means. One of the commitments we have as God's people is to see growth and expansion of God's life among people and this surely does involve our local churches growing and attracting people into their midst. The point being made here is different from that. If the basic intention of our engagement in the neighborhood is to attract and get people into our church then we will, no matter how much we might want it otherwise, treat our neighbors as the objects of that goal, as ends to a strategy.

Furthermore, your neighbors will sense this and when someone realizes you're engaging with them in order to get them to do

something they'll close down and you won't hear their stories. These stories are the rich soil, the places where you hear what God is doing in a community. Listening to the neighbor without putting it into a strategy is about discerning God at work in your neighborhood.

You want to develop the practice of listening to the stories of your neighbors in order to discern what God is up to in, with and among them. On the basis of this listening and discerning, you want to ask the question: How might you be called to join with what God is up to in the neighborhood? This will involve you figuring out some simple experiments that help you learn together how to join with God.

This diagram shows the rhythm of engagement we're proposing:



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It's important to listen to people's stories without presuming, concluding or trying to develop strategies for getting them to do or become something. This might sound counterintuitive, but by doing this you discover that inside these stories are clues to discerning where you might join with the Spirit in your communities. This practice of joining with the Spirit (remember the Luke 10: 1-12 passage) will give you the capacities to discover fresh ways of being the church in and for your communities. Out of this, the church itself will grow and be transformed in ways that can't be imagined or predicted at the outset.

People ask how they go about listening to and discerning the stories of their community. Here are some ideas you to consider as you talk about this together in your group meetings.

## Ways people gather and connect in your community

- Young moms may meet in certain spaces and carry on a rich discourse about the neighborhood – perhaps some of us could join them.
- Seniors gather regularly in certain coffee shops to talk with each other about the neighborhood – they are open and eager for others to join in and listen to their stories.
- Teens and young adults do their communicating via text messaging or *Facebook*, etc. How might you join the conversations? What are the issues and themes these young people are addressing?
- Where are the local gathering spots in the area? Who gathers there? What would be involved in hanging out there sometimes?
- What are the local stores visited often?
- Who gathers at the bus stop each morning?
- Where are there clubs, gyms or other local places people gather?

## Starting conversations

We've almost lost the art of simply talking with one another. People can feel you're intruding or threatening them just by asking questions. Everyone needs to feel safe before to enter conversations. We all need to create safe spaces for conversations. Here are questions you might ask:

- When did you first move into this neighborhood?
- What brought you here?
- What are your best memories of this neighborhood?

- What do you like best about the area?
- Tell me a about your family.
- What would you love to see happen in this community?

Let these conversations be natural. It's not about reading down a list but simply asking people about themselves and the community in the regular flow of conversation.

Assume you have multiple opportunities to talk with people rather than a one-time event. Casually ask a few questions at a time or just see where the conversation flows. After the conversations, when you're on your own, jot down what you are hearing. Make some simple notes of ideas and themes or connections you're making as you listen.

## Listening to your community in a Wired World

We live in a wired world. Many of us communicate with each other via the Internet and it will not be possible to 'listen' to all the voices of your community without engaging the Internet. Here are some suggestions for connecting with a whole group of people you might miss:

- Set up a *Facebook*, *LinkedIn* or other social networking account. Create some conversations and be open to connecting with new people and discuss issues that impact your neighborhood.
- Spend some time researching the ways people are connecting in your neighborhood. For example, are there book clubs, gyms, hiking groups, crafting groups, support groups, social clubs, etc. that draw people together.
- Find a local blogger who is writing about issues or topics that interest you. Take the time to follow, comment and connect with people who have similar interests to you and might even live in your area.

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Think about how you could plan an event for your neighborhood over the next several weeks or month and be ready for the stories and for connections to develop.

## Host a Neighborhood Event

We moved into our new neighborhood in August. It was a special move because after fifteen years in the one community, Jane and I had found a new house that we share with our daughter and her family.

After we'd settled in and organized the house to work with our multiple needs, it was getting into early December. We had met some of our neighbors and were beginning to sense that this was a great place to be but we wanted to get know many more. A Christmas party was the answer. We decided to invite people to our home to meet our new neighbors.

One evening, Jane and Matthew and the two boys, Ethan and Ben, went door to door with invitations. They were able to connect with half the neighbors on the street. I was given the task of going door to door and inviting the other half of the street. I reflected a little on what it might look like for a man to appear at someone's door in the dark of the early evening and decided to be very cautious. With that in mind, I invited my grandson, Ethan to come with me. Ethan would knock at the door, give people the invitation and ask them to join us. Faces of concern and fear turned to surprise and delight as Ethan extended the invitation. So we went from house to house finding almost everyone welcoming and happy to be invited. Such simple acts bring so much reward. I delighted in Ethan skipping down the street and stood back as he gave the invitation. Who could refuse!

Inviting is one thing, people turning up is quite another. We prepared for the evening. The house looked beautiful with Christmas trees and lights on the trees out front. But the nagging question was: Who will come! To our great surprise and delight, most of the neighborhood turned up. The kitchen and dining room were filled with people who were soon in animated conversation with one another and us as the new folk on the block.

That evening we connected with a lot of our neighbors, learning about them and their lives. We also learned about our new home (once a hunting lodge that was the oldest house on the street now in an elegant Cape Cod design) and what it had been at the beginnings of this community. It was an easy event to carry off and we felt ourselves connected with neighbors. Now in the shopping center down the street and on the street we know each other and have conversations.

## A Sample Story

In Melbourne, Australia, Andrew moved into a neighborhood several years ago. It was a fairly rich, upper middle class area and feels like a hard place to make connections with people. The houses were quite expensive, so people seemed to be protective and focused on how their properties looked and wanted to ensure their upkeep. One of the ways people did that was by putting up large fences around the front of the property to separate the house from the street. Often, therefore, people could walk down a street and never actually see anybody at the front of the houses. As a result, there wasn't much conversation or connection with people.

Andrew's house didn't have a decent fence, but he and his wife have two young children who could easily wander off onto the street if they were not watched all the time. A new fence seemed like the natural thing to put up. What they did, however, was construct an iron fence with thin, vertical steel posts every four to six inches. The result was security for the children, but a fence that was open and easy to see through. The house doesn't feel cut off or hidden from the sidewalk. Andrew didn't plan it this way so he wasn't really thinking about visibility and neighborhood.

Recently an elderly woman was walking by the house. Andrew was out front in the garden as she passed by and she stopped to talk with him. The conversation began with the woman saying thank-you. Andrew was a little bemused because he didn't know why she was expressing her thanks. She explained. As a widow living alone in the neighborhood, she would walk down the street seeing no one and talking with no one. In the midst of this isolation and loneliness, she came to Andrew's home with the children and the fence that connected the sidewalk with the house and she was suddenly in contact with other people. A simple conversation began across the fence and a neighbor began telling a little of her story. In the midst of the story were clues about the neighborhood and, perhaps, hints of what the Spirit was up to in the neighborhood.

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## Personal Journal Questions

- What are the issues and conversations important to various groups in your neighborhood?
- How are these being expressed and why?
- Who speaks for the community? Why are they seen as important voices? What are they saying?
- Who doesn't have a voice? Why?
- Who are the historians and poets of the community?
- What are they saying?
- What resources does the neighborhood have? What is absent and why?
- Who has power? Who is without power? Why?
- What kinds of conversations keep coming up?
- Which do you find energizing?
- What is it about them that energized you?
- What parts of your life connect with them?
- Where do you think you see Jesus in this story?
- What are best ways to share these stories with the group?

# 5. Discernment

This is a new way of thinking about God, the Gospel and mission for all of us.

What if God wants you to discover what the Spirit is up to in your very own neighborhoods? What might it mean to have your eyes opened and your minds converted to this idea that God is out there ahead of you in the neighborhood up to something? How might you ask what God is up to?

Notice how we frame the work you will be doing – it is about what God *might* be up to in the neighborhood. The reasons for stating it in this way are important:

- We are learning new practices of Christian life in our communities. Learning is always tentative. This is why the language of *experimenting* has been used, not to suggest we're using people as guinea pigs, but to indicate that we are genuinely learners who will make mistakes and need to figure out this discernment work through trial and error together. Therefore, we can't pretend to know what God is up to, only that we're taking some stabs at figuring it out.
- None of us assume we simply know with certainty what God is up to in a community. That would be arrogance of the worst kind. But what we do know is that the God of the Scriptures is always ahead of us, already at work in the midst of an ordinary, local community. The language of *might* suggests a stance of faithful humility that is open to being surprised by the activities of the Spirit.

In this step you will:

- *Dwell in the Word* through Luke 10: 1-12.
- Work with the idea from Luke 10 that God is already ahead of this seventy who go out in twos and ask what that means for being in the neighborhood.
- Work together around the question of what clues you're getting about what God might be up to in the neighborhood.
- Create some initial convictions about where God is at work.

## Steps 1-6

1. Reading your Neighborhood
2. The Gospel and your Neighbor
3. Mapping your Neighborhood
4. Attending to Stories
- 5. Discerning**
6. Experimenting

## What is God up to in your Neighborhood?

Out of the shared stories, what are you starting to discover about what God may be up to in the neighborhood? This is a new way of thinking about God, the Gospel and mission. Sometimes you come to believe that the only place where you can really know anything about what God is up to is when you're parked on a pew in a church building listening to a sermon or gathered in a small group reading the Bible with people you've known for a very long time. But what if God wants you to discover what the Spirit is up to in your very own neighborhoods? What might it mean to have your eyes opened and your minds converted to this idea that God is out there ahead of you in the neighborhood up to something? How might you ask what God is up to?

### Learning to Discern

In some ways this will feel like the most difficult step you have taken. We want to practice discernment or the naming of what we believe God might be up to in our neighborhoods. This discernment/naming process is based on the *Dwelling in the Word* you have done together and the listening to the stories of the people you have engaged with. In one sense you are taking this dwelling and listening process one step further by asking this:

In the midst of all you have done how do you dwell together with God, in order to listen to what the Spirit might be saying about God's presence in all this?

To this point you have worked at developing new eyes and ears to connect with the stories of our community, as well as dwell together in Scripture. Now you want to ask how this work invites you to name what God is up to.

Several years ago, a pastor friend, Ryan, moved with his young family from suburban Philadelphia to Hollywood, Los Angeles. Ryan had grown up in the LA area and didn't want to return to the seemingly endless suburbs of Orange County, but when he saw the church's building on Hollywood drive set beside the intersections of the busy 101, something grabbed hold of him. Even after the interview with church leaders who seemed discouraged, Ryan still sensed something inside telling him this was where he was to be. This he would name as God's call. After arriving some months later, Ryan was himself shocked to discover that the church seemed to be without a center, focus or even much of an identity. It was hard to know who actually belonged; he wondered if anything could happen in this place at the center of so many multiple, competing, and crazy worlds.

Unknown to Ryan, God was already up to things in the neighborhoods around Hollywood and Van Ness. In the words of Luke 10: 1-12, there were already *people of shalom* in the area wondering about what it might mean to be God's people and love their neighborhoods. One of these people was a young architect who decided she wanted to move into the area and, in ways that may not have made sense to her at the time, learn to dwell in the neighborhood. As she gradually reconnected with the area, and the people on the streets, she also became aware of homeless people set back in the nooks and crannies of the community. If she had chosen to drive in and out of her own house whenever she went to work or traveled to the stores, she would never have seen what was happening on the streets where she lived, nor would she have had conversations with people around her. In the midst of her moving back into the neighborhood, she began attending Ryan's church.

As a part of that community she participated in *Dwelling in the Word*, as well as listening to the stories of people in her church and community. In the midst of this, she began to sense dis-ease and desire to do something about the homeless people in the streets around where she lived. Through the continued engagements in the church, she was able to name the fact that God was inviting her to join with others in searching out answers to the homeless. Some of that meant connecting with community action groups, and some with visits to City Hall to ensure that the voices of these residents were being heard. Something else happened in this naming of what God was up to in her neighborhood. In her work as an architect, she was designing housing that was marketed to people who had significant incomes. Now she became more aware that in the architectural firm where she worked, others were working on designing assisted-housing projects. She went to a partner in the firm to describe her new interest, asking if she could work on the assisted-housing projects. It was a risky move in a tight job market, but this conviction about what God was doing in the community had taken hold of her. It is now also shaping her vocation as an architect.

This is one example of how a young woman learned to name what God was doing.

#### **Steps 1-6**

1. Reading your Neighborhood
2. The Gospel and your Neighbor
3. Mapping your Neighborhood
4. Attending to Stories
- 5. Discerning**
6. Experimenting

## Is this really for ordinary Christians?

Some of those reading this Section may have hurdles to get over in terms of the idea of discerning what God is up to in the community. This question of discernment may confront some really ingrained beliefs about God and, closer to home, who one is as an ordinary person attending a church. In the first place, most of us don't believe we're equipped to do this naming. It feels arrogant. What would give us the ability or affront to dare to assume we can discern what God is up to? Who has that kind of certainty? None of us have, to be truthful. It's not about certainty, but something else.

Others may feel that they are not good enough to name what God might be up to. We view ourselves as ordinary human beings, who are flawed and, therefore, not fit to do such a thing. Or we view ourselves as untrained, certainly not in the kind of 'spiritual' place where we could even start to imagine naming what God might be doing. At least that's the way our thinking may tend to go. Surely, we think, we would need to be specially trained, even ordained, or at least in some kind of special group to do this? Besides, we don't know how to do this. Isn't this why special people are trained? They, then, have the specialized skills and techniques to know how to do this after years of prayer and humility. Who would dare take the risk of naming what God is up to? What happens if we are wrong? We might mess everything up or look like terrible failures.

What if all of these thoughts come from false notions of spirituality? What if they are dead wrong about how God works and communicates with us? What if this invitation to dwell, listen and name is exactly how God works? What if the Spirit is inviting those who aren't specially trained to be the very one's who discern what God is up to in the neighborhood. Perhaps we have been misguided and this is part of the reason we find it so hard to see God at work in a community? We look too much to special kinds of people or assume it's only in a church that we can know what God is doing.

This section invites you to explore the conviction that God actually wants to invite you to begin to discern what the Spirit is up to in your neighborhood.

## Learning/Testing as a Community

Simon Carey Holt in his book *God and Engaging the Neighborhood: Spirituality and Mission in the Neighborhood* writes that this naming is not a solitary business but a communal practice. He wants us to understand something of the journey involved in this way of being a local church. Most of us are schooled in making individual decisions about fairly important things in life. We might talk to others about buying a new house or accepting a job offer, but usually we go make private decisions and then let others know the decision. This is often a good process but an unintended consequence is that we are habituated to think most important actions or decisions we do independently.

A single mother and member of a church group made a decision about her vocation and then, afterwards, informed the members of her group. She wasn't seeking to leave them out of the decision making process, but had gone ahead and made a private decision out of habit. She told them she had prayed about it and felt at peace.

Another couple met a friend for a late evening meal one night and talked about their decision to leave the city where they lived and the business they'd developed to join a church staff in another city. They were informing about their decision not seeking a communal process of seeking to name what God may be doing in the midst of the options before them. Again, they weren't trying to hide something or avoid talking with their friends about the decisions they were making, they were just acting like individuals formed in a culture where we name our own realities.

In each case this lack of a communal discernment resulted in painful experiences. The single mom moved to the new job, which quickly unraveled leaving her without work at a critical point in her children's life. The couple moved their family thousands of miles only to have the church situation that had seemed to be clearly the right thing to do, result in dismissal and deep pain. In each case a process of communal listening and discernment would have produced different results.

The problem Carey Holt is naming is that we don't have the habit or practice of doing this with each other. A practice is a little like developing an effective golf swing or a mastering a difficult choir number. It requires us to learn some new skills and do them over and over again until they become a natural part of what we do. This discernment of what God is doing in our neighborhood is like that; it calls for learning new habits and practicing them over and over again until they become a part of who we are.

### Steps 1-6

1. Reading your Neighborhood
2. The Gospel and your Neighbor
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## Group Work

The idea in naming what God is up to isn't to try and do this ourselves, but to try and share what we are hearing and discovering in our neighborhood with others. The next step is to practice discernment together. In doing this, we are going to try and not always get it right. Like a golfer learning to putt a shot on an undulating green, we will initially tap the ball only to see it roll away from the hole. But as we practice together, we start to learn the lay of the land and how to place the ball. Discerning what God is doing isn't exactly like that because, in a very real sense, the 'hole' we're aiming at is often little more than an inkling or hunch, while at other times it's a burning conviction that this is what we have to do. It's more about testing and trying in a new environment and this kind of practice is always best done together rather than alone.

## Group Work

In your group gathering take a number of weeks to work through the following process of listening to and affirming one another.

1. As a group begin by *Dwelling* in Luke 10
2. As a whole group spend your time together in the following:
  - Each person shares their responses to the *Personal Journal Questions* from the last section.
  - Take time to move through this process. Set aside a number of weeks to dwell with each other in this listening process.
  - After each person has shared, set aside some time to pray with that person in terms of discernment about where he/she might be invited to join with what the Spirit is doing in the community.
3. This is a time of listening to one another and then praying for God's guidance. Allow at least a week for the group to pray before responding to what anyone has shared. This is not the time for deciding on actions, recommendations or advice.
4. After everyone has had a chance to share personal responses to the questions return to a second round of conversation. This time focus for a time on each person, individually and invite the others to ask questions about the stories and responses of that person. Everyone should be clear this is not about giving advice nor a time to launch into one's personal set of comments (i.e., don't use this time as a stage for your voice and plans since this is all about listening to and honoring the ways of God in the other). This is a time to assist one another to listen more deeply to what has been shared. Here are some questions the group might want to ask of each other (people will have other important questions they want to ask):

- Are there places in what has been shared where you would want more clarity?
  - Does what has been shared connect with other things you have seen in the life of the one who shared? Can you name them for the person?
  - Is there anything in what you have heard that raises a question or concern? Can you name it for the person?
5. After each person has had opportunity for this listening and dwelling, the group works together in seeking to discern what they sense God might be inviting each one to join with in his/her neighborhood. The way to do this is as follows:
- Taking each of the stories one at a time and based on the conversations that have taken place invite the person who shared to name what he/she sense God is up to in this story.
  - Invite others to respond by affirming and/or commenting.
  - Pray together around the discernment that has taken place.

## Personal Journal Questions

Each person uses the next week to do the following:

- Write down what you heard your group saying to you about the potential place where you are being invited to join with what God is up to in your neighborhood.
- On the basis of this naming respond to the following questions:
  - In what ways is God calling you to join in what is being named?
  - What kinds of actions might be involved?
  - If you don't know, how might you find out?
  - Where does this connect with others in the group?
  - Might there be a common invitation(s) among you?



### Personal Journal Questions

#### Steps 1-6

1. Reading your Neighborhood
2. The Gospel and your Neighbor
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6. Experimenting



## 6. Experimenting

To be the church is to be the hands and feet of Jesus. The call to the neighborhood is about discovering where we might join with what God is already birthing and creating. How do we do that? This section gives us some ways in which we can put together what we've been discovering and name some places where we can join with what God is doing.

In this part you will:

- *Dwell in the Word* through Luke 10: 1-12.
- Commit to a simple experiment in joining with God in your neighborhood.

### Group Work

In your group meeting:

- Share your *Personal Journal* responses from last week.
- As you do this, test to see if there might be common places where several group members sense a call to work together.
- Outline the actions steps that each will initiate sharing why you have chosen these particular steps.
- Ask the group to provide feedback.

In subsequent group meetings you will come together to do the following:

- Share what you have done and learned in taking some action steps. Doing this provides a context for the whole process of experimenting. As discussed earlier, experiments are about trying things we haven't done before in order to test and learn new habits and actions. It is to be expected, therefore, that you won't all be perfect or even good at this for the first time. You will need to try small steps then report on what you've done so that friends can help you reflect on what you've done as well as learn how to take some next baby steps together.
- Keep asking the question of how and where you are discerning what God is up to in the midst of your baby step experiments.

It's often not 'natural' for people in local churches to ask one another what they see God doing or ask each other for help in learning how to do this. Again, the group becomes the place where you test and try in safety with one another.

The other important part of this exercise is that it helps to keep



### Group Work

#### Steps 1-6

1. Reading your Neighborhood
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you focused on the purpose of your work. You want to learn to work with God in your communities. There are many, many good things we can be doing in a neighborhood, your work here is seeking to see where God is at work in people and join with that. As you enter these experiments all kinds of opportunities will spring up that become those moments when you see or sense God at work. Here are some simple illustrations:

## Story One

A group of women decided they would join a book club for newcomers to the community. The books were chosen by group consensus and represented a wide range of literature. As they met month by month they shared questions about the books and in that sharing emerged many personal conversations about people's lives and their own wrestling with meaning. These conversations were full of God's presence in the longings and the responses. While these conversations led to other engagements outside the group something took place at the end of one evening that could never have been scripted. After most people had left, one of the women stayed behind at the host's home. She began to share not just her loneliness but that in the economic meltdown, as a single person, she was not making ends meet. She then took out some homemade costume jewelry asking if the host would like to purchase some. This was one of the moments when we saw God up to something and were being invited to join with it.

## Story Two

In the Midlands of the UK, one church had begun to develop many such connect points with its community continually asking the question of what God was up to in the area and how they could join in. As a result of this continual connecting with people one Sunday morning a man walked into the meeting room where the church was worshipping. He was in his 60s and, as they came to recognize, had worked in a blue-collar job on a shop floor all his life. He stood at the door of the room watching the worship service draw to a close. When it was over, Martin, one of the elders, went over the man to welcome him and pick up conversation. The man confessed that he had never been in a church in his life. It is just amazing to realize that here, in the middle of England, was a 60 something retired 'Brummy' who had never been in church. Martin asked him what he thought of the worship. The man responded that he didn't understand it but one thing was clear – there was community here. When Martin asked him about his reasons for this observation the man responded that when he looked around he saw very different people all gathered together – young and old as well as different nationalities. Beside that, the man observed, even after the service was over people stayed

around to talk with one another. He was seeing community at work. Over several months this man came with his wife to an Alpha course; they are now Christians and actively involved in the church. Equally, he is now connecting with people in the community as he cleans up the large park grounds that surround the pavilion where the church meets.

Continue this meeting, sharing and engaging on a regular basis. You will find yourselves increasingly becoming a little community that needs to assist, pray, support and problem-solve with one another as you get continually surprised by the ways the Spirit connects you with people and their questions.

## Person Journal Questions

- If someone in your local church asked you to share what you have done what would you tell him or her?
- If you were going to communicate with you church when it meets together and had 10 minutes to speak, what would you tell the people?
- The leaders of your church have observed what your group has been doing. They want you to meet with them and make some recommendations about the church engaging in neighborhoods. What would be the three or four most significant points you would want them to understand?
- What cautions would you want to give these leaders?
- What would you do differently now that you have walked through this journey?



### Personal Journal Questions

#### Steps 1-6

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# 4. Communication and Next Steps



## Coaching TIPS

This section invites your group to assemble a report or communication piece that gathers together the stories of what you've done and shares what you're learning. This will help others 'catch' what has been happening and get excited about joining in.

At this point you gather your learning and experiences to share with the church and its board. This can be done in all kinds of creative ways; for example, take them for a walk through your community pointing out what you've done, showing places where you've seen God at work. The purpose is to give the board the information and insight that will help it discern how your church can continue this journey of moving back into the neighborhood.

## Creating a report for your leadership

It is important that the church is invited to discover what you have experienced and learned in order to assess how it might take some next steps. This is a critical step because you want to have this process of *MBiN* become part of your church's life. You do not want *MBiN* to be a one-off event that a few people get excited about, then a few months later everything goes back to the status quo. You have an important role to play in assisting your church, through its leaders, consider some next steps.

A majority of people in a local church are interested in joining with this moving back into the neighborhood, but it's new and few have seen or experienced what it might mean. When we haven't experienced something before, most of us wait to see what happens when some of the 'early adopters' jump in and give it a try. You are these early adopters. Now you want to invite others to come and join in the movement, but they need to get a sense of a few things first:

- What did you do?
- What did you experience?
- What stories suggest this isn't like mountain climbing or standing in front of a train?
- What did you learn?
- What were the steps?
- How do you feel about it now?

People need simple, energized responses to these questions. The steps to creating this kind of report don't have to be complex; they are about providing simple answers and telling stories. It's the stories that connect with people. Good communication takes people on a journey that helps them get hold of the ways you entered and listened to the people of the community.

As a group, put together your story to share with your people. The *Workbook* provides some simple steps; however, you may know a much better way of telling the story to your people.

## Some Basic Elements of a Report

- Introduction.
- Why we began.
- What we did, including brief overview of stages.
- What we learned and experienced from *Dwelling in the Word*.
- Stories, pictures, anecdotes from walking about and 'waking up' to your neighborhood.
- Share 2 or 3 brief stories of your listening experiences with people in the community.
- Describe what it means to 'discern what God is doing in the neighborhood'.
- Share your experiences in experimenting with joining God.
- Describe briefly what you personally learned and discovered.
- Suggest ways others could engage their neighborhoods.

## Presenting a Report

You've done a lot of creative and hard work over a period of months. You want the rest of the church to see what you have seen and join in. The way you present your report determines the reception it receives. The following common sense guidelines will help you do this.

There are two basic steps involved.

1. Ask for a meeting with the Board/Leaders of the church.
  - Request about 90 minutes so you can share your report and spend a good bit of time for questions and answers.
  - In this meeting be prepared to suggest some recommendations to the Board/Leaders for next steps.
  - Ask permission to share you report with the church
2. Sharing the report with the church.

Remember that a small number of enthusiastic and committed people have been involved in this moving back into the neighborhood experiment, but the rest of the church won't have the same level of enthusiasm or commitment. Be prepared to take time in bringing others on board.

People do not respond well to huge amounts of paper. Carefully think through key stories and moments in your journey together these past months. Tell the story of what you did like a travelogue, rather than a dull report. Limit yourselves to the most effective

communication pieces and the most important information in the smallest amount of space. Use pictures and stories rather than too much paper or data.

The first, and most important, group with whom to share your report is the official leadership of the church. This group needs to develop a strong sense of ownership if moving back into the neighborhood is going to become part of the DNA of the church. Ask for an evening with this group, rather than an hour on a busy docket, in order to report effectively to them. An important goal is to have them *own* the next steps. You want the Board to come away from this meeting with the leadership excited and enthusiastic about what you've done and eager to have the church hear all about it.

Include times different members of the group share personally out of what they have experienced and learned. Tell about particularly significant incidents or meetings with people that encapsulate the process.

Include some simple recommendations for next steps and how the report can be used. Leave lots of time for questions and dialogue with the leadership.

## Next Steps

This final section of the *Workbook* is for the Board/Leadership of the church. It invites them to take the work that has been done by a number of church teams over a six - eight month period and consider what might be some next steps God is calling the church to take. This will involve:

1. *Dwelling in the Word* (Luke 10:29-37) each time you meet.
2. Assess what has taken place.
3. Assure that as leaders you understand the key elements of *MBiN*.
4. Approach next steps not as the initiation of a church-wide program but involving another set of people and the neighborhoods where they live as a second stage for the church.
5. Plan how to communicate these next steps to the congregation as a whole.
6. Determine who will be the leadership person who gives time and attention to moving these next steps forward.
7. Establish some ways of continuing a communication loop with the new groups and the leadership for continued learning.

# 5. Resources



## Dwelling in the Word

Everything we will do in this *Workbook* is about cultivating discernment. Along with learning to be incarnationally present in our neighborhoods and seeing (discerning) what God is already doing there, the other key act of discerning is *Dwelling in the Word*.

This practice is about learning to listen to the voice of God and one another's voices through Scripture. Each time you meet as teams, or as leadership, you are invited to dwell in Scripture. *This is different from Bible Study because it's an exercise in listening and attending, rather than building a knowledge base about the Bible.*

What follows is a description of how to create a *Dwelling in the Word* time. It is essential that in this first and in all subsequent meetings together, you begin with this time of dwelling.

Discerning together what God is up to in our neighborhoods is not so much about techniques or skills as it is learning to hear God together and so discern how we might join with the Spirit in our neighborhoods and communities. This is why listening is so important. In every step of the journey we invite each other to dwell in the Word. The following guidelines will help you get started.

Give yourself 30 minutes to complete the dwelling section. The text is Luke 10: 1-12. It is a text about mission, describing the sending of the seventy into the towns and villages where Jesus, himself, would go.

## Outline of *Dwelling in the Word*

1. Explain the steps below to the group.
2. Ask someone to read the passage out loud to the group.
3. Ask everyone to wait in silence before the text for several minutes. As they do that invite them to reflect on one of these questions:
  - *As the text was read, where did you stop?*
  - *What insight or sense of God did you gain?*
  - *What question do you want to ask about the text?*
4. After a few minutes of silence, ask people to find someone else in the room that you do not know that well or, perhaps, have not met before and pair up with them.
5. Ask one to listen and one to speak about his/her responses to the questions outlined above. After two minutes, switch roles: one listens and the other speaks. Emphasize that the purpose is to listen attentively to what the other is saying. This is their one, single task – listen to the other. They may ask questions to help them understand what the other person is saying, but the focus of attention is on listening attentively to the other. Tell people they shouldn't give their advice to the other or talk about something that is triggered in them by listening to the other person. They are to listen and ask questions for clarification only.
6. After four of five minutes invite people to come back together as a group. Ask people to do two things:
  1. introduce the person they were with
  2. share what they heard their partner saying

Again, remind people that their role is to report what they heard the other sharing with them, not to report their own ideas or use the other person's sharing as a springboard to talk about what they think. Note: This is a much harder task that one might first imagine. The attitude is one of focused attention on and reporting the words of the other. The temptation is to anticipate what the other will say and not listen or jump in and share one's own wonderfully insightful comments. More often than not, when people are invited to share what they heard the other person saying someone will stand up and talk about their own interpretation or views.

### **Example: Reporting Back**

1. My partner was Sherrie, she's from the North area of town just above the highway. Sherrie's been coming to ... for the past five years and is a single mom.
2. Sherrie stopped near the beginning of the text at Jesus' instructions to not take anything extra with them and not to stop or greet anyone on the road. She said it all sounded a bit scary going out like that without anything to take with you and it just seemed rude to not stop to say hello to people on the way.

7. After numbers of people have shared like this, thank everyone for participating and underline again that we are learning how to listen to God in Scripture through one another. This is not about experts with answers but comes out of the conviction that the Spirit speaks to us through the ordinariness of each other's lives.
8. Finally, let people know that this kind of *Dwelling in the Word* process will be a part of what you do each time you meet.

## Resources

Below are a list of the video and other resources recommended throughout the *MBiN Workbook*. All the videos can be viewed at <http://vimeo.com/groups/mbin>.



### Videos

#### Videos

- Dwelling in the Word
- Dwelling in the Word: Luke 10
- Ryan Bell: Parts 1-4
- Simon Carey Holt - The God Next Door: Parts 1-5
- Howard Lawrence
- Reaching a New Generation - REVISITED
- Understanding the Missional Change Model and its Use in Your Church
- Watch for new videos being added to the *MBiN Group* on Vimeo.

#### Other

- *Reading the Everyday*: [http://www.johndavies.org/Reading-Everyday-Third\\_Way.pdf](http://www.johndavies.org/Reading-Everyday-Third_Way.pdf)
- *MBiN Workshop*. You can schedule a one-day workshop for your church leaders or the whole church as a way of introducing this process.
- *MBiN Webinar* offering regular or as-needed coaching and support during your *MBiN* process.

# Outline of *MBiN* Process

## Step 1: Reading your Neighborhood

*MBiN* is about learning to see our community with a fresh set of eyes and listening with newly tuned ears. How might we become detectives of God's life in our neighbors and among the activities of the streets where we live? The practices described below will prepare you to be surprised by them Spirit.

In this step you will :

- *Dwelling in the Word* together using Luke 10: 1- 12.
- New Eyes: Look at what it might mean for us to develop a way of seeing your neighborhood the way God might see it just now.
- New Ears: Discover what it means to become attentive to the stories of people in your neighborhood and creating a *safe space* for stories to be told.
- Learn an initial exercise of walking about your neighborhood at different times of the day and noting what you are seeing.

## Step 2: The Gospel and your Neighbor

*"... but who is my neighbor?"*

People ask why we bother with this idea of the neighbor and the neighborhood when so many of us live in what we call a *connected world*, where we meet friends online or drive miles to meet them in another part of town or across the country.

In this step you will:

- Read together the parable of the Good Samaritan in order to ask new questions about who is our neighbor.
- Share with each other what we've been discovering in some of our walking around the neighborhood.
- See if there are any 'first' stories about the neighborhood that we can share with one another.
- Talk about the idea of planning a neighborhood BBQ or something else that might gather people.

## Step 3: Mapping your Neighborhood

*"... enter the villages and towns and..."*

As we walk around we start to develop fresh eyes around what might have previously been taken for granted. A helpful way to develop new eyes is by creating 'maps' of your neighborhood and sharing with one another the stories of what we're seeing. This mapping helps us discover what we might not be seeing and create new appreciation for what is actually happening everyday that we miss. It helps us learn to ask new kinds of questions about our community.

In this step you will:

- *Dwelling in the Word*: Continue to dwell in the Parable of the Good Samaritan.
- Look at a sample neighborhood 'maps' and talk about how to draw your own (chart paper, whiteboards, bulletin boards, display boards, etc.).
- Share any new kinds of questions you might be developing about your neighborhood.
- Talk about gathering and meeting places in your neighborhood and how you can connect with them.
- Share with each other how you might find ways of learning about some of the stories of people on your street.
- Talk about how we might start practicing hospitality with some of the people on our street.

## Step 4: Attending to Stories

*"... enter the villages and towns and..."*

How do you listen to the stories of your neighborhood? What is so important about listening to the stories of the people around you and how do you learn to hear what they are saying rather than presuming and concluding? Why is story so critical to knowing what God is doing in a community? These are the questions you'll ask to make fresh discoveries about your community.

In this step you will:

- *Dwell in the Word* through Luke 10: 1-12.
- Share your maps with one another.
- Share what you know about the people who live on your street.
- Talk together about how you might find natural ways of attending to the stories of some who live on your street.
- Continue to meet to share with one another the stories and what you are learning about your neighborhood.
- Report on what you are discovering about our neighborhood as you practice hospitality among people on the street.

## Step 5: Discernment

This is a new way of thinking about God, the Gospel and mission. Sometimes we come to believe that the only place where we can really know anything about what God is up to is when we're parked on a pew in a church building listening to a sermon or gathered in a small group reading the Bible with people we've known for a very long time.

What if God wants us to discover what the Spirit is up to in our very own neighborhoods? What might it mean to have our eyes opened and our minds converted to this idea that God is out there ahead of us in the neighborhood up to something? How might we ask what God is up to?

In this step you will:

- *Dwell in the Word* through Luke 10: 1-12.
- Work with the idea from Luke 10 that God is already ahead of this seventy who go out in twos and ask what that means for being in the neighborhood.
- Work together around the question of what clues you're getting about what God might be up to in the neighborhood.
- Create some initial convictions about where God is at work.

## Step 6: Experimenting

To be the church is to be the hands and feet of Jesus. The call to the neighborhood is about discovering where we might join with what God is already birthing and creating. How do we do that? This section gives us some ways in which we can put together what we've been discovering and name some places where we can join with what God is doing.

In this step you will:

- *Dwell in the Word* through Luke 10: 1-12.
- Commit to a simple experiment in joining with God in your neighborhood.