



# LIVING THE MISSION PRAYER

AWAKEN RISK BLESS

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

EVALUATING OUR TRUE CAPACITY

GATHERING AROUND THE MISSION PRAYER

GETTING STARTED WITH EXPERIMENTS

MAKING DECISIONS AS A TEAM

OUR CHANGING CONTEXT FOR MISSION



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## EVALUATING OUR TRUE CAPACITY FOR MISSION

*This resource helps individuals and groups evaluate their capacity to engage in Christ's mission through a reflective process over time. It helps us consider who we are becoming and how we will respond to our individual and shared journey of discipleship in community.*

### PROCESS

You are encouraged to engage in this process over a period of several weeks. Begin each gathering with prayer and an opportunity to center in the living Word of scripture. Be patient and work your way through the questions, providing plenty of time for conversation and reflection.

1. Begin each gathering with prayer.
2. Use a Dwelling in the Word scripture. We suggest using Luke 10:1–12. Capture the insights and questions that emerge as you listen to one another and God in this passage.
3. Consider the following questions in order over several sessions. Consider asking a few individuals to be prepared with a song, reading, or prayer as moments of blessing during each session. Also consider asking someone to serve as a scribe for your session. As people respond to various questions, it would be helpful to have newsprint to record responses. Consider beginning each session by providing a few moments for individuals to review responses from the prior session.
  - a. As you reflect over the past several months, in what ways have you received blessing as a result of living the mission prayer individually and in this community?
  - b. What specific conditions were present that led to these experiences of blessing?
  - c. As you think about our journey as a small group or congregation what is at the very core of who you are and are becoming? Make a list together and see if some common themes emerge. Are there one to three predominant themes that seem to capture the very core of who you are and are becoming as a group?



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- d. First, together make a list of all the tasks, activities, and ministries associated with your small group or congregation. Compare the list to your response to “question c.” Which of these tasks, activities, and ministries are most closely linked to the very core of who you are and are becoming? Which are not closely linked?
- e. Prayerfully consider the next faithful steps of your congregation or small group in response to “question c.” What might some next steps look like?
- f. Are there tasks, activities, or ministries you are feeling led to release in order to make room for what is emerging? Make a list and invite the group to prayerfully consider the list for the next time you gather.
- g. Make a revised list of tasks, activities, and ministries that you feel led to continue into the future. Next to each task, activity, or ministry place the name of an individual(s) that currently or will have responsibility for that function in the future.
- h. After everything has been assigned see how many names appear more than once on this list. Evaluate together whether there are those who may have too many functions assigned to them. Either redistribute the functions to others or take more tasks, activities, and ministries off the list until each person has responsibility for only one or two functions.
- i. Pause for a few moments of reflection and ask each individual in the group to share how they are feeling about the revised list of tasks, activities, and ministries and distribution of responsibility. Is this at the core of who we feel God is calling us to become? Is this sustainable going into the future? Does this provide balance so no one person is overwhelmed with responsibility?

End your time together with prayer



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## GATHERING AROUND THE MISSION PRAYER

### An Outline

*The outline below provides one way to gather using the rhythm of the mission prayer. There are many ways to use the rhythm of Awaken, Risk, and Bless in planning your time together as Christian community.*


### Awaken to God and One Another


 **Community Gathering:** Begin by sharing how you are coming into the experience of community. What is on your heart and mind and how is this impacting your ability to be fully present and engaged in the experience?

*Note: For larger groups consider doing this in groups of three or four. (See **Cultivating Awareness Practice** for a more detailed explanation of how to engage in this community practice.)*

End with a prayer of gratitude for thoughts expressed and unexpressed.

### Risk New Questions, Conversation, and Compassionate Actions

 **Community Centering:** Move into a time of centering in the Spirit's presence. There are many simple and meaningful ways to do this including a moment of silence, various prayer forms, hymn texts, and Taizé singing. The focus of this time is to create an opening within to be receptive to the Spirit's work as you move into Community Exploration.

 **Community Exploration:** Engage in a community spiritual practice that provides opportunity to explore and apply Christ's message and mission to our lives, neighborhoods, and world today (See **Initial Practices** in the **Living the Mission Prayer as Way of Life Guide** and at [www.missionalleaders.org](http://www.missionalleaders.org) and [www.cofchrist.org/spiritualformation](http://www.cofchrist.org/spiritualformation).) For practices that don't specifically reference scripture consider selecting a relevant scripture to use alongside the practice.



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*Note: Lectionary scriptures are a good place to start, but you may also be drawn to other scripture texts that are relevant to the journey of your group. (See 24 Months of Dwelling in the Word on [www.missionalleaders.org](http://www.missionalleaders.org) as an example.)*


As you engage in a selected practice, invite your group to reflect and share their responses to the following questions:


- What did I learn as I listened and shared with others?
- How might the Spirit be inviting me to respond in compassionate action for others or the earth?

Important: Consider how you will engage children and youth in your practice. This does not need to be complicated. Simple questions, activities like drawing, or crafts that provide ways for younger people and adults to express themselves are great ways to get everyone involved.

**Note:** *This approach to gathering is intended to be more participative than passive. If you choose to have someone share focus thoughts or a message in place of a community practice, be sure to provide opportunity for reflection and sharing as part of that experience. Consider using the two questions above and invite the group to reflect on what they heard and how they might respond.*

## Bless One Another, Our Neighborhoods, and the Earth

 **Community Generous Response:** Engage in the community practice of Disciples' Generous Response. Consider how the Spirit is inviting us to share through whole-life stewardship locally and globally in the mission of Christ today. See <https://www.cofchrist.org/disciples-generous-response-tools> for examples of how worldwide mission tithes are transforming lives around the world.

 **Community Blessing:** Bring this time of sharing together to a close by offering words of encouragement and/or challenge. Consider a closing hymn, song, or some form of prayer or blessing to send the community to become a blessing of God's love and peace in the coming week.



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## GETTING STARTED WITH EXPERIMENTS

So how does a leadership team, small group, or congregation go about launching experiments? The following guidelines can help everyone know what the ground rules are and reduce potential misunderstandings or anxiety.

- It is helpful if individuals considering an experiment can convey their initial hopes for an experiment and how they will evaluate the outcomes of the experiment. Sometimes individuals may need a little help expressing their hopes and outcomes. Patience and attentiveness are critical at this stage! You are encouraged *not* be critical at this stage.
- When it comes to ministry experiments, we are often taking a leap of faith. It is important to remember that some experiments will work well and others not so well. In all cases we will learn together and celebrate our willingness to step into the future with God! Don't overanalyze a proposal or idea for an experiment.
- Experiments that affect the ministries or responsibilities of others in a congregation or small group need to be coordinated and supported by those affected. Providing an environment conducive to experiments does not mean anything goes.
- Like everything we do in mission, experiments are best when shared with others. It is ideal to ensure that anyone engaging in an experiment has at least one person supporting them in ways they mutually agree upon.
- Group/congregational approval is not needed for an experiment that will not use group/congregational resources or affect existing ministries of the congregation. The nature of experiments requires a group or congregation to create an environment favorable toward risk. Do not hamper experiments with elaborate or unnecessary steps for approval.
- Remember to pause at times for reflective conversation to explore successes, challenges, and lessons learned during or throughout the experiment. (See *Getting Started with Reflective Conversation for help.*)
- Be attentive to those willing to risk new experiments by praying often for them, offering words of encouragement, and helping coordinate any assistance they may need.

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



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

Experiments don't need to be complicated. The role of the Christian community in any form is to encourage a willingness to risk something new in response to the movement of the Spirit in our lives together.

## Questions to Encourage Experimentation

Questions to consider when you are in reflective conversation and preparing to risk an experiment:

1. What ideas are emerging for you as you have engaged in inward and outward practices? Or how are your experiences with others and their life challenges leading to potential ways you can share God's love and peace?
2. Do any of the ideas energize or disrupt you because they connect with your sense of call, giftedness, or an unfilled need?
3. How do the ideas connect with our mission?
4. What do you hope might happen with your idea or experiment?
5. How would you describe your idea or experiment?
6. Who else might you involve in your idea or experiment?
7. What do you need to start your experiment?
8. What is inhibiting you from getting started?
9. How can others help support you in your experiment?
10. How much time is needed for doing the experiment before stepping back to evaluate initial outcomes with others?
11. If the experiment unfolds as you had hoped and is becoming an ongoing ministry, what does ongoing support look like?

Remember, inward and outward spiritual practices create fertile ground for new insights as does our willingness to be in conversation and dream a little about God's future in the places we serve. On the last page of this document, you will find a suggested format entitled "Launching Experiments" for constructing an experiment.





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## Launching Experiments

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

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

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

- What steps will you take to experiment with your idea or question?
- Who will you involve with you in your idea or experiment? (Everyone should have at least one partner.)
- What is the time frame for your experiment?
- What outcomes do you hope to realize?

**Resources**—In a few sentences outline any resources you need (people, money, use of church building, for example) to launch your experiment.

**Points of Collaboration**—Does your proposed experiment touch any existing ministries or activities of your congregation or small group? If so, whom do you need to collaborate with prior to moving forward with your experiment?

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

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





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## MAKING DECISIONS AS A TEAM

*Living Our Identity and Calling as Communities of Christ*

### Materials Needed

A set of green, yellow, and red index cards for each member of the team

### Introduction

The purpose of “Making Decisions as a Team” is to *truly hear one another* so the decisions of the team reflect the best thinking and creativity of the members. This practice offers steps for building consensus by using colored cards to indicate the level of support for a decision about a particular question or issue.

**Green means** “I support this.”

**Yellow means** “I need more information or time to think.”

**Red means** “I disagree with this.”

The benefit of using a colored card to represent a level of support for a decision or idea is that we hear from each member. This gives the team opportunity to truly listen and respond to all team members’ suggestions and concerns to reach the highest level of support possible for a particular decision.

Remember in traditional group conversation we often don’t hear from everyone present. Silence does not mean support. This approach engages everyone in the process.

### Steps

1. Each team member has a red, green, and yellow card and understands what they represent.
2. The team decides what level of support must be reached to move forward with a decision. Members that hold up a yellow or red card have opportunity to express their views. In some cases, a member may disagree with a decision but still be willing to support the team if they are the only member that objects.

For a small team like a Pastor Leadership Team (PLT), 80% level of support may be a good place to start. For a PLT with five persons, four green cards represent



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80% (one member will either have a yellow or red card). Deciding up front what constitutes a decision creates transparency and helps everyone recognize when the team will move forward with a decision or when more time is needed for conversation.

3. **Optional:** The team agrees that a team member who wants to speak after the first person speaks must briefly (in a few sentences) restate the position or concern of the person who just spoke to her/his level of satisfaction. It is important that *what was said was both heard and understood*. Do not short-change this step. Slowing down the conversation by taking this step will compel team members to listen more carefully to one another rather than just formulating responses.
4. Identify someone to be the facilitator. The facilitator poses the question to be decided, ensures everyone has an opportunity to speak, and asks if an acceptable level of support is being reached.
5. After adequate conversation has occurred, the facilitator asks members of the team to hold up the color card that represents their level of support for the emerging decision. Once each person's level of support is revealed, any person holding a yellow or red card explains his or her level of support for the team's decision. *Note: After hearing from those who hold yellow or red cards, green card holders may want to change their level of support, and the decision may need to be modified.*
6. During step 5 it may become apparent that a modification to the question/proposal would result in a higher level of support. If so, test the modification by using the colored cards to show the team's level of support.
7. Continue until one of two outcomes occurs: 1) the team reaches the level of support required to move forward, or 2) the team does not reach the level of support required and more time is needed before a decision is made. *Both outcomes are acceptable* and represent the will of the team.

**Note:** The process is as important as the outcome. Build trust and make decisions as a team. *It is critical for persons holding yellow or red cards to feel valued and not pressured to switch to a green card just so the group can move on to other agenda items.* The process takes longer but the results will provide a greater level of ownership of decisions and a higher level of trust in one another.

**Faithful Disagreement\***



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Members may remain in disagreement to a decision and still abide by it and continue to support the overall direction of the PLT or congregation. This is perfectly acceptable. Attempts to force someone into consent will harm both the person and the decision-making process. There may be those who speak in disagreement, just so the discussion benefits from an alternative perspective. Members in “faithful disagreement,” when heard and respected, help the team make better decisions with greater support.

\*See *Faithful Disagreement*, World Church Leadership Council March 2013



## Our Changing Context for Mission

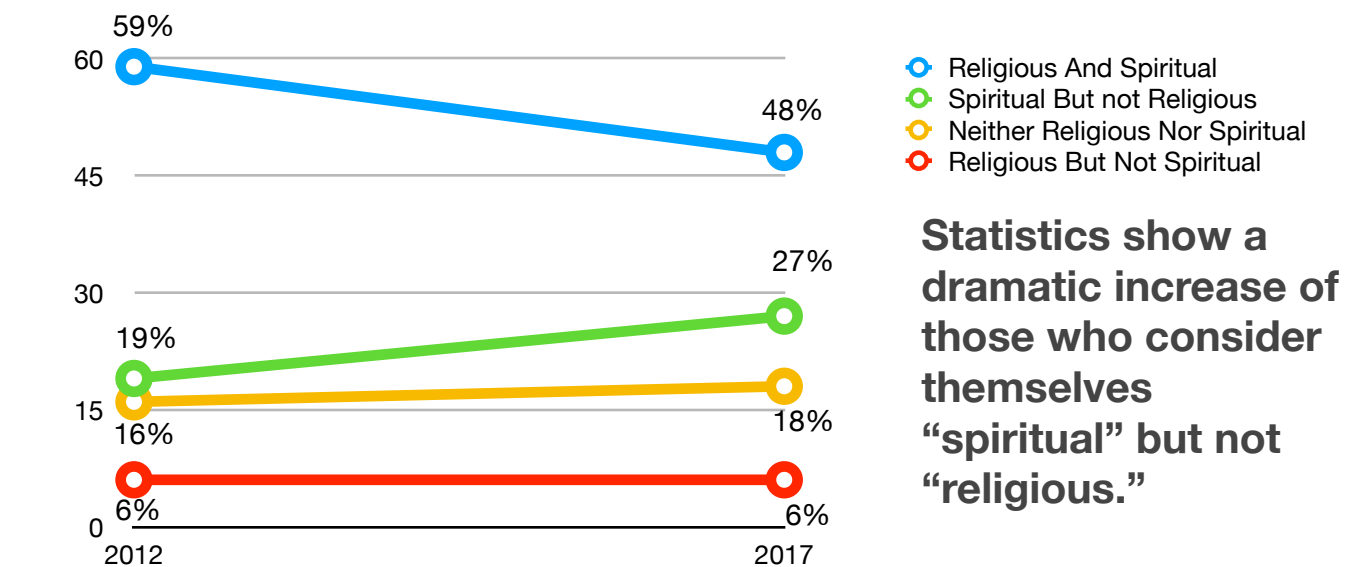
### Awaken

*“More than ever before, spirituality is not handed to us in reliable packages, and we must cultivate an incarnational worldview capable of finding God in all things-making our world a sanctuary instead of searching for a temple.”<sup>1</sup>*

*“Now in this moment, now in this day, God is creating and leading the way; life is behind us, life is before; we write the story not heard before.”<sup>2</sup>*

This is a moment in history with great cultural and religious upheaval. As we live into a rhythm of awakening, risking, and blessing, we will need to begin by awakening to the major shifts happening around us. What we have experienced as decline in numbers and participation in church is really pointing to something deeper.

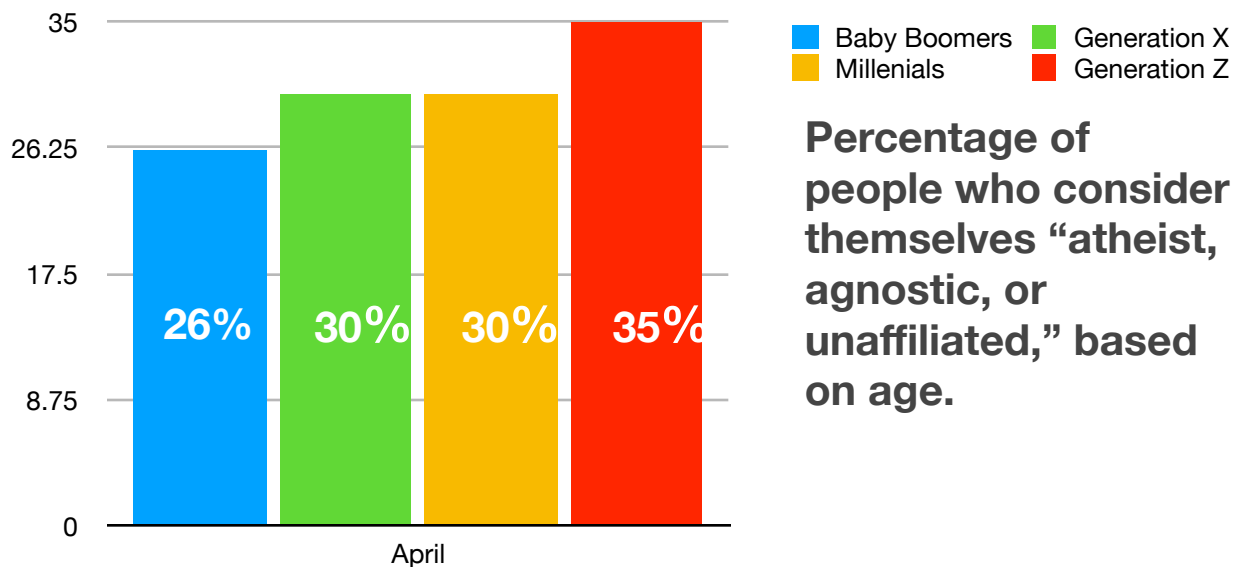
Let's begin by taking a look at some of the trends in research:<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Joseph Stewart-Sicking and Diana Butler Bass, *Spiritual Friendship after Religion: Walking with People While the Rules Are Changing* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2016), 54.

<sup>2</sup> Community of Christ, ed., *Community of Christ Sings*, Pew ed (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 2013), *Now in this Moment*, 96.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/06/more-americans-now-say-theyre-spiritual-but-not-religious/>



Barna Group Study<sup>4</sup>

#### WHAT DO THESE NUMBERS MEAN?

The most important thing to understand about the statistics in our changing religious context is that although there is a decline in people who participate in religious institutions, there is an *increased* interest in the spiritual life. Notice that in the five year span of this study by Pew Research center, those who claimed to be “spiritual but not religious” increased from 19% in 2012 to 27% in 2017. That means that over one quarter of people in the US are hungry for spiritual fulfillment but are not finding that in the institutional church.

In a study by Barna Group (see second graphic), there is striking data that 35% of Generation Z considers themselves to be atheist, agnostic, or unaffiliated. That’s an increase of 5% between Millennials and Generation Z (13-19 year olds).

<sup>4</sup> Barna Group: <https://www.christianpost.com/news/gen-z-is-the-least-christian-generation-in-american-history-barna-finds-214856/>



At first glance it would seem that these two studies contradict each other. How can there be an increase in spiritual yearning as *well* as an increase in atheism and agnosticism?

In reality, these studies teach us that spiritual hunger and longing for connection can also accompany deep theological questioning and skepticism. This skepticism may have driven people from the church, where they have often received a narrative that particular belief is required for belonging - but the yearning for spiritual connection has not gone away.

Diana Butler Bass frames this well in her book, *Christianity After Religion*. She writes, “For the last few centuries, Western Christianity ordered faith in a particular way. Catholics and Protestants taught that belief came first, behavior came next, and finally belonging resulted, depending on how you answered the first two questions.”<sup>5</sup>

This order of faith - belief, behavior, and belonging - has led to the trends we are seeing in our changing context. When belief is required for belonging, those with questions or skepticism have often walked away. We are called reverse this order. As Bass writes, “Instead of believing, behaving, and belonging, we need to reverse the order to belonging, behaving, and believing. And therein lies the difference between religion-as-institution and *religio* as a spiritually vital faith.”<sup>6</sup>

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## Risk

President Veazey shared the following insights about our identity and calling during his September 20, 2017 address to the church:

“The future church is being formed by a basic concept: Our chief purpose is to birth, nurture, and multiply communities of disciples and seekers engaged in spiritual formation and compassionate ministry and action. This basic blueprint—spiritual

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<sup>5</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 201.

<sup>6</sup> Bass, 204.



formation, community, compassionate ministry and action—is true to the vision of Christ. Everything else, like organizational structure, resources, funding methods, congregational forms, etc., should support this primary purpose.”

#### **QUESTIONS TO FOR REFLECTION AND RESPONSE**

- Have you experienced faith in the order which Diana Butler Bass describes - belief, behavior, and then belonging?
- What would the reverse look like?
- President Veazey has offered us a blueprint for the future church. What stands out to you in his words above?
- How might a community shaped by spiritual formation and compassionate action differ from our current models of church?

#### **ACTION STEPS**

- Go out into the neighborhood. Choose a time (even Sunday morning!) to get to know your context by walking the neighborhood, spending time in local shops or gathering places. Who is in your community? Who is not?
- If you choose to walk the neighborhood on a Sunday morning, notice what goes on in your community during the hours normally dedicated to church.
- Be open to forming new relationships! The Spirit is already moving ahead of us; all we need to do is risk following where it leads.





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## Bless

- Listen to the song Pray by Sam Smith. You can find a version on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhREiAarjVY>
- Share in the Round about what you hear in the song - what are the longings that you hear?
- Offer a closing prayer in response to what you hear in the song.