



# LIVING THE MISSION PRAYER

AWAKEN RISK BLESS

## 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?