

Mission is Like the Repeated Cycle of Growth

Worship Encounter

Station One: *Cultivating the Soil*

Description: Before planting, the soil must be prepared. Harrowing the soil breaks up clods and removes the root systems of weeds that threaten to choke out life. Over time, soil can be compacted which makes it difficult for plant life to grow and receive necessary nutrients. The soil is disrupted and turned over so that root systems can spread out and thrive, so that aeration can occur—the necessary breathing for the process of growth to begin.

Reflection and questions: Encounter can cause disruption in the settled, compacted soil of congregation life. Change, turning things over, can seem chaotic and uncomfortable, when it is really a necessary part of the cycle of growth. In my congregation, what needs to breathe? What needs to be broken up and turned over preparing the way for new life?

Materials:

- Container of hard or clumpy dirt with a shovel, twigs, rocks, etc. in the dirt.
- Copies of the prayer of disruption by Joyce Rupp. Is this an extra copy of handout for placement at activity?

Information on Instruction Card: Turn the soil over to symbolize disruption and change. Pay attention to the barriers as you turn over the soil. Spend a moment considering what spaces are needed for breathing and what needs to be turned over for new life to flourish in your life and congregation.

Pray the prayer of disruption by Joyce Rupp.

Divine Challenger, when did I stop risking? When did I lose my edge for adventure and surprise? When did I start pretending that what I now know is all there is to know? When did I give in to fear and bow to security? When did I let uncertainty press against my free spirit? When did I start moving toward the sure, easy thing? When did I give

away my ability to be disturbed? When did I start refusing to pay the price for fuller depth and joy? When did I let panic of the unknown future wrap its barbed wire fingers around my desire to grow? Inner source of courage, nudge me toward growth. Urge me away from my strongholds. Convince me of my potential to leap beyond the barriers. - Joyce Rupp **In the handout section.**

Station Two: *The Seed*

Description: Planting is more than putting seed in the ground. It is all about understanding context. A good farmer or gardener knows what type of conditions, climates, geography, and soil composition are needed for a seed to thrive. It requires certain attentiveness to the intended planting place and to the seed itself. How much sun does the seed need, and at what time of day does the sunlight reach this particular piece of earth where it is planted?

Reflection and questions: This is the work of investing in relationship and abandoning a one-size-fits-all approach. It is about getting to know the places we serve and the people within those places. What is the composition of my community? What is needed for life to thrive? Am I paying attention to both soil and seed?

Materials:

- Basket of many kinds of seeds.
- Seed chart with descriptions of growing patterns and what is needed for growth (as a visual of different conditions for different seeds).

Information on Instruction Cards: Choose a seed from the basket and hold it in your hands. Notice that different seeds require different conditions for growth. Consider the context of your community or a particular relationship. What is needed to more fully live mission in that place? Are there things you already know? Are there things you want to find out? Prayerfully hold a seed as a symbol that you need to grow in relationship and in understanding your context before immediately planting. Carry your seed with you to the next station.

Station Three: *Waiting*

Description:

Though planting requires time and attention, it also requires trust and the ability to relinquish control in the waiting time. We are humbled in the process of life—knowing there is only so much we can do before we must trust the mystery at work—forming in soil darkness beyond what we can know or see. Different seeds can take different amounts of time to finally break through the surface and sprout green with life. “The seed is in the ground, now may we rest in hope while darkness does its work.” Wendell Berry

Reflection and questions: We cannot hurry it along. We wait expectant and hope-filled for new life signs. In my congregation, are we waiting expectant? Are we willing to relinquish control of our own agendas and ways of doing things? Are we searching for new life signs? Are we willing to wait and trust in what is unseen?

Materials:

- Container of soil, (only one is needed) several inches deep and approximately 8 inches by 30 inches.

Information on Instruction Cards: Linger here. Place your seed in the soil until you cannot see it. Spend a moment in prayer over those things that are beyond your control. Consider what happens to the seed we plant and to us as the seed, in the soil’s darkness.

Station Four: *Tending*

Description: Tending is the ongoing work of maintaining health while life is growing. It may involve weeding, paying attention to water intake, cutting back or creating more space to grow. It is about being with whatever life is forming and the sometimes tedious, back straining work of bending low and caring for. This can be a repetitive, attentive process.

Reflection and questions: There is joy in tending because growth can be seen and harvest is near. What practices are you engaging in that help you sense the presence of the holy and sustain what are growing within and around you? In your congregation, what is necessary for tending the growth you now see? Ask yourself, “Am I paying attention to what is still needed or just hoping it will make it on its own? Am I willing to put in the effort to sustain what is coming alive among us?”

Materials:

- A pack of Post-it notes
- Pens and markers.
- White board, large poster sheets or over-sized paper and write in the center the word TENDING.
- Place a few Post-it notes on the board to give people an idea. On each post-it note write things such as: “Call Gary to go out for a meal.” “Spend time in prayer over congregation member struggling with cancer.” “Start praying the Mission Prayer with my congregation.” “Invite the new family in the neighborhood over for dinner.”

Information on Instruction Cards: On the Post-it notes, write yourself “tending” notes—things that you can do to tend the life emerging on your congregation’s missional journey. Place your “tending” notes on the board symbolizing your commitment to tend to those things. Think details, think people and places, think spaces where your attention and energy would make a difference. Consider some of those things that “fall through the cracks” of congregational life but may actually be really important as we grow in community together.

Station Five: *Harvesting*

Description: When the time has come, mature crops are harvested.

Reflection and questions: Harvest is about celebration, reveling in the growth that has occurred. Harvest can result in nourishment. It is noticing when something is ripe enough to take and enjoy! Are we, in my congregation, pausing to recognize when life has thrived? Are we feasting on God’s presence abundant?

Materials:

- Grapes still “on the vine.”
- Other foods representing harvest?
- A green “live” plant in a pot as a visual.

Information on Instructions Cards: Take and eat a grape. Be slow and deliberate. Really taste what you are putting in your mouth. Consider the long journey of growth the grape has been on and give thanks for nourishment and for life! Think of those moments in congregational life when you are able to taste God’s vision for us and experience the blessings of being fully alive! Nothing is too small to qualify. It could be a simple recognition as you admire a congregation member’s willingness to change or a growing relationship with neighbors in your community. Whatever it is that “makes it all worth it,” spend a moment to relish that feeling and celebrate the journey you are on!

Station Six: *Sabbath—Rest*

Note to facilitator: Ask several people from LCM or field staff, preferably not PLTs or CSMs, to offer silent blessings as people come through the station.

Description: It is a biblical imperative, and a sign of wise earth care, to let the soil rest. Time is needed to replenish necessary nutrients. Artificially adding nutrients and rushing ahead can actually strip the soil of its ability to sustain life over the long haul.

Reflection and Questions: We need time and space to experience Sabbath. Are we allowing ourselves to rest into God’s presence, to hear the voice that speaks in silence, and to allow our own discernment to renew and refresh us for whatever is next?

Materials:

- Chairs for sitting/ spaces for lingering... make this a comfortable and inviting space
- Container of smooth soil.
- Lit candles

Information on Instruction Cards: Just be. Allow yourself to be blessed. Rest into God's presence and sit in the silence. Know that this too is part of the journey. Seek God's direction and replenishment for you and your congregation... preparing to begin the cycle again and again. When you are ready, return to your seat and consider which cycle of the journey most resonates with where you and your congregation are in your missional journey. Are you cultivating the soil? Getting to know the seeds? Planting and waiting in the darkness of soil? Tending new life signs? Harvesting abundance in its many forms? Resting and seeking replenishment and fresh vision?