

RECLAIMING MISSION

Going & Gathering

Recovering the Missional Heart of God

The Rev. Canon Michael D. Vinson

NEMA Synod · Reformed Episcopal Church · November 5–6, 2026

The questions every parish asks

1 *How does a parish become missional?*

2 *How do we see more visitors and grow our congregations?*

3 *What, in the end, should we be doing?*

The Church does not become missional because it is declining.

The Church is missional because God is missional.

Decline may awaken us to our calling, but our calling precedes our circumstances.

Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

JOHN 20:21

God moves toward us

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.

JOHN 1:14

> *"He came into our realm, although he was not far from us before."*
>
> ST. ATHANASIUS, ON THE INCARNATION 8

Before the Church ever went anywhere, God came.

Mission is who we are

REC100

55th General Council, 2017

Mission at the center of everything we are and do.

Mission is not one ministry among many.

It is the horizon within which every ministry finds its purpose.

The heart precedes the hands

Mission must flow from a heart formed by the love of God, overflowing to the lost.

> *"And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee."*
>
> THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER (1928), THE HOLY COMMUNION



Gathered by grace.

Sent in love.

◆ IV · GOING AND GATHERING

The Great Supper

"Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city … Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled."

LUKE 14:21, 23 · THE GOSPEL FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

◆ **The streets.** ◆ **The house.** ◆ **The table.**

Thou hast made us for thyself, and our heart is restless, until it rest in thee.

ST. AUGUSTINE, CONFESSIONS 1.1

WHO IS IN THE STREETS AND LANES?

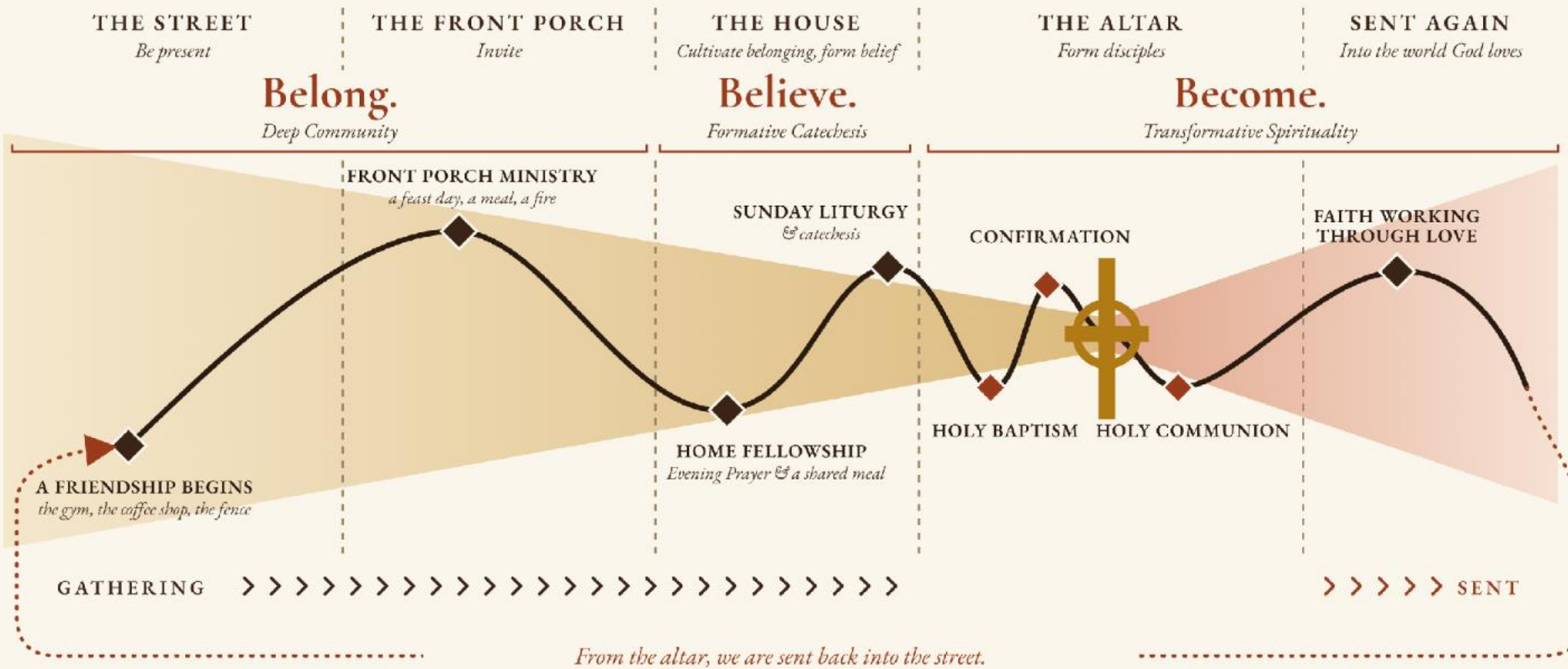
"Tell me before all this started that someday I would gladly attend two church services daily, and I will say you are mad. On Iona I longed for our hours in the church like a hunger. The words in the prayer book felt to me like escape valves. … I'd found a language for faith that I could let in. For the first time in a long while, I noticed I was having only one thought at a time."

LAMORNA ASH, DON'T FORGET WE'RE HERE FOREVER (2025)

Going & Gathering

The map of the Great Supper — "Go out into the streets and lanes ... that my house may be filled." Luke 14

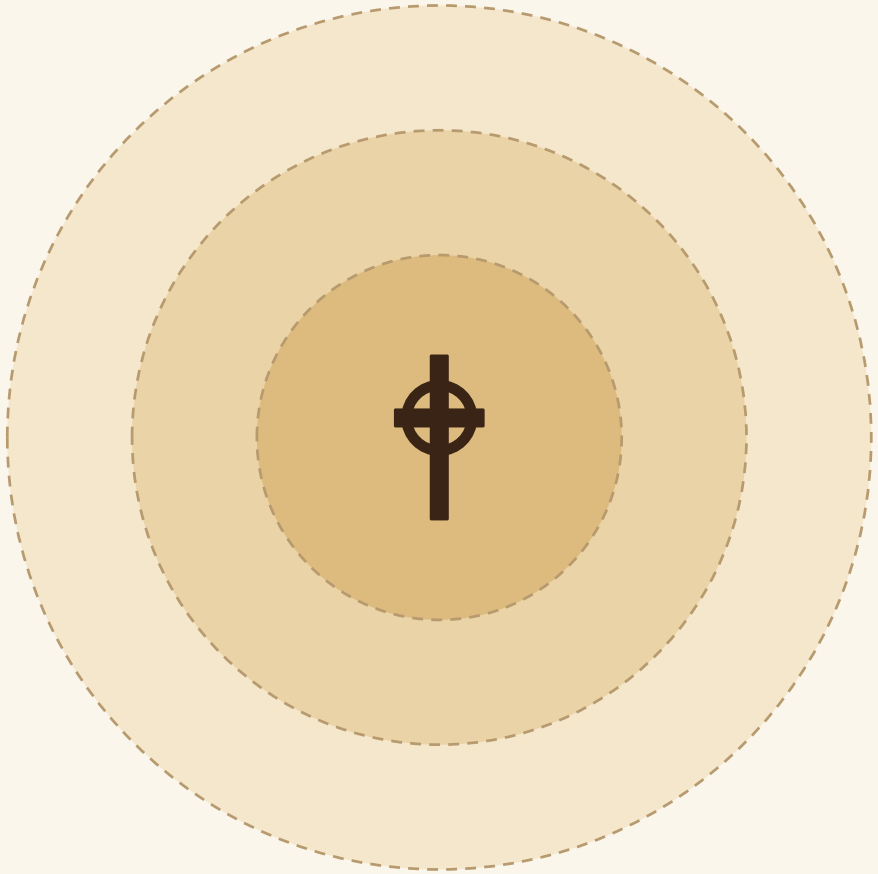
Friendship — *the hinge of the whole* — **Holy Fellowship** — *koinōnia*



From the altar, we are sent back into the street.

Where has God placed us?

- What lies within a mile of your church?
- Where do your people work, shop, eat, and volunteer?
- Who lives within sight of your bell tower and has never crossed your threshold?



YOUR PARISH MILE

YOUR PARISH MILE · 90 SECONDS

Three places. Three names.

3

PLACES

Within a mile of your church where you have never been seen

3

NAMES

People you will pray for, by name, every day this week

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THE STREET
Be present

Belong.
Deep Community



GATHERING

SENT

From the altar, we are sent back into the street.

Be present

People will often come to us when they can see us, and when we are not in a hurry.

"What the soul is in the body, that Christians are in the world."
EPISTLE TO DIOGNETUS 6.1



Christ and Abbot Menas

Monastery of Apa Apollo, Bawit, Egypt · sixth century · Musée du Louvre

Not enthroned above him. Beside him.

Here we are, you and I, and I hope a third, Christ, is in our midst.

ST. AELRED OF RIEVAULX, SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP 1.1

"He first findeth his own brother Simon … and he brought him to Jesus."
JOHN 1:41–42

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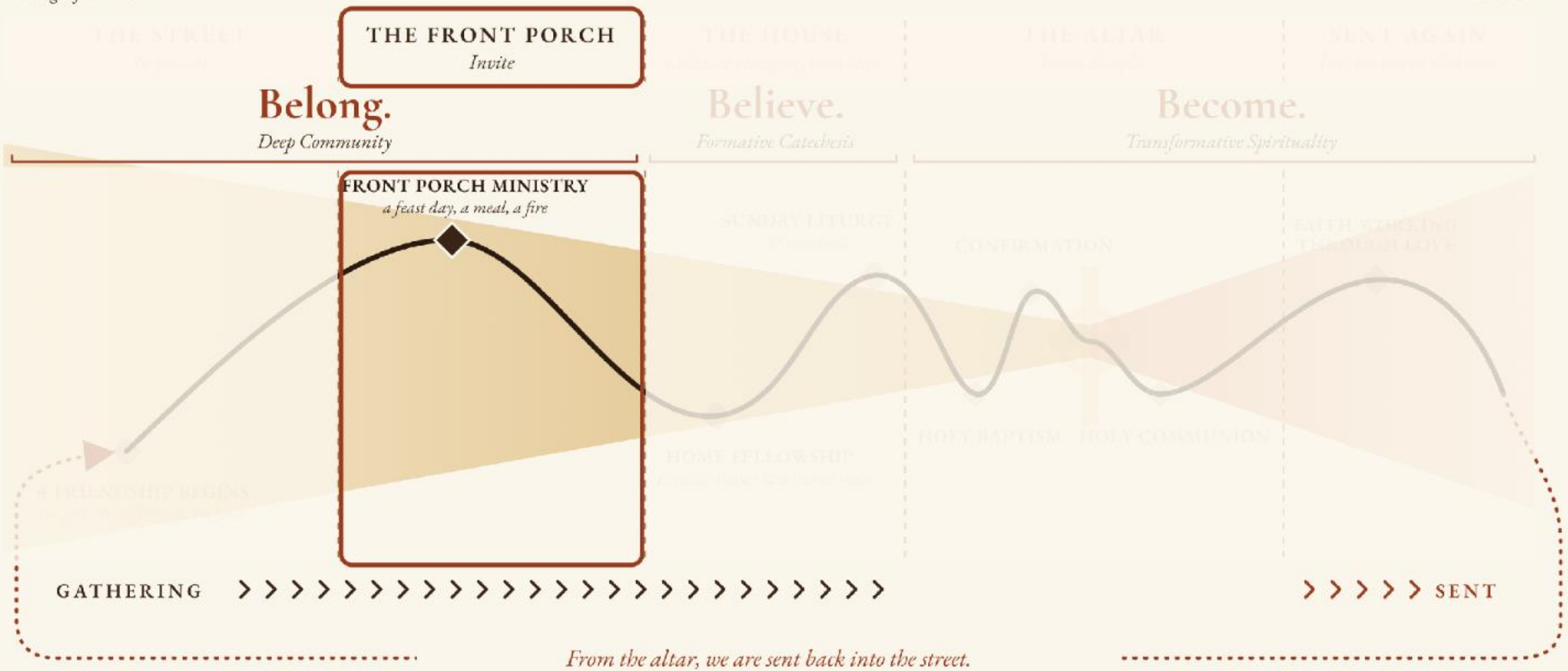

Invite

TREASURES WE ALREADY POSSESS

- A Rogation procession
- A blessing of animals
- An Epiphany house blessing
- An Advent choir concert

THE ORDINARY LIFE OF THE PARISH

- A garage sale or quilters' club
- A women's Bible study
- A cigar fellowship by the fire
- Twelfth Night and the patronal feast

Fishing with nets, not hooks. BISHOP RAY SUTTON

Let all guests who arrive be received as Christ, for he himself will say, I was a stranger and ye took me in.

THE RULE OF ST. BENEDICT, CHAPTER 53

Belonging is the soil, not the harvest.

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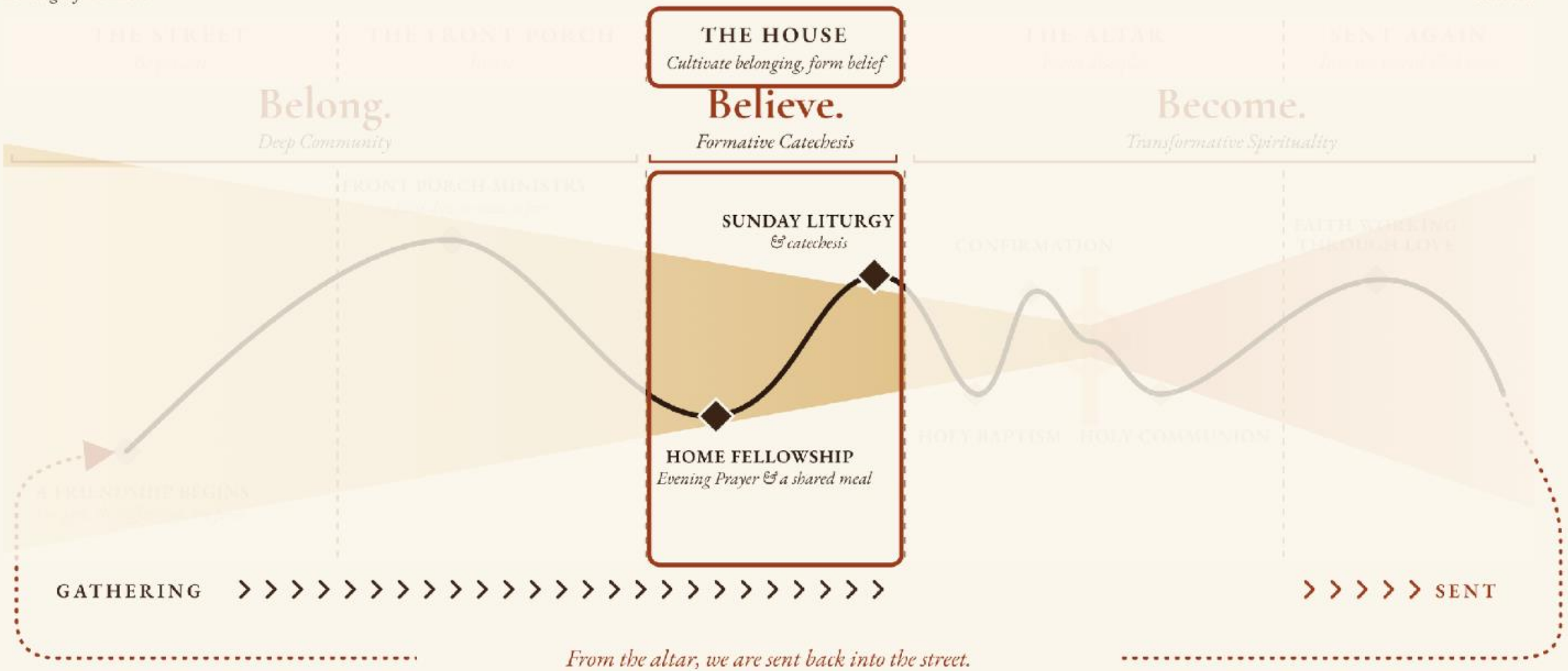

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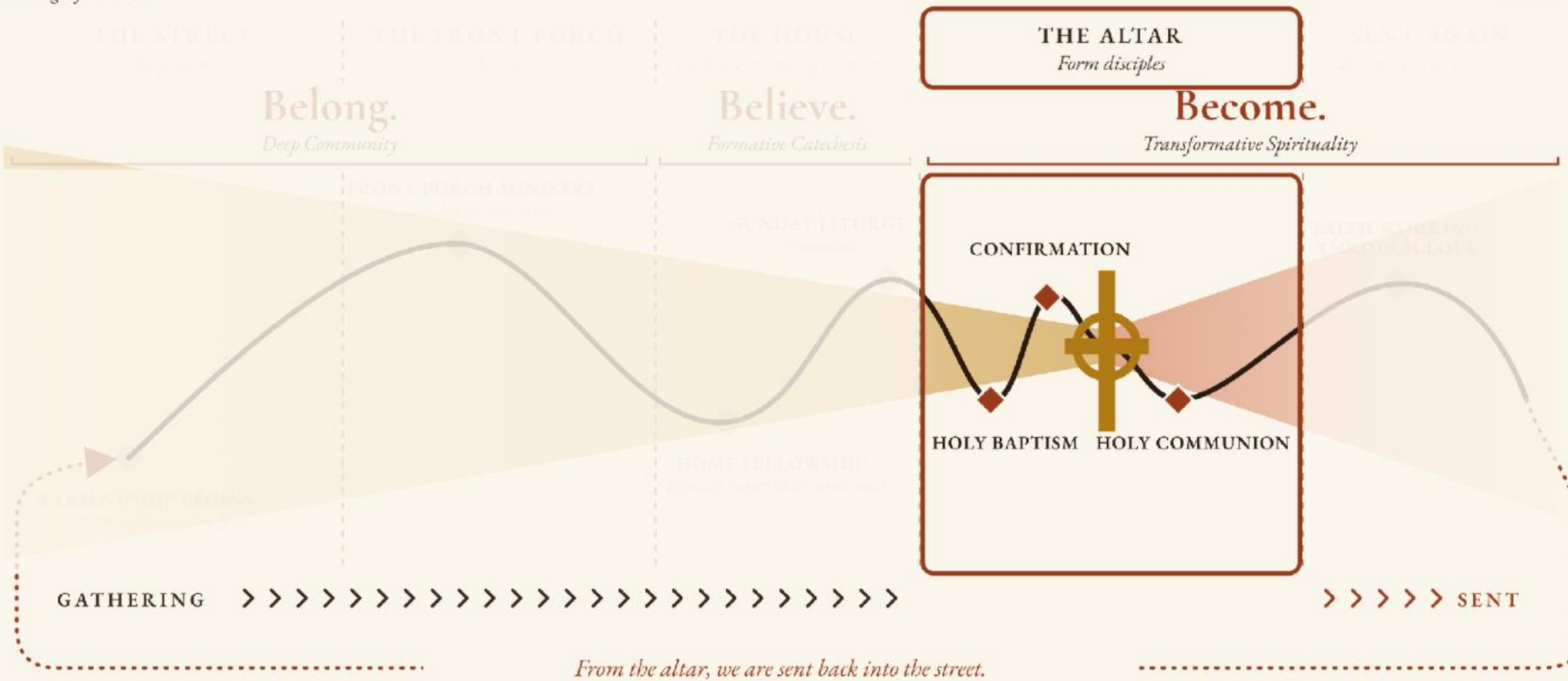

From the altar, we are sent back into the street.

“Come; for all things are now ready.”

LUKE 14:17



Holy Baptism



Confirmation



Holy Communion

The Church’s sacramental life is not a private possession to be guarded from the world. It is the very life into which Christ gathers his people.

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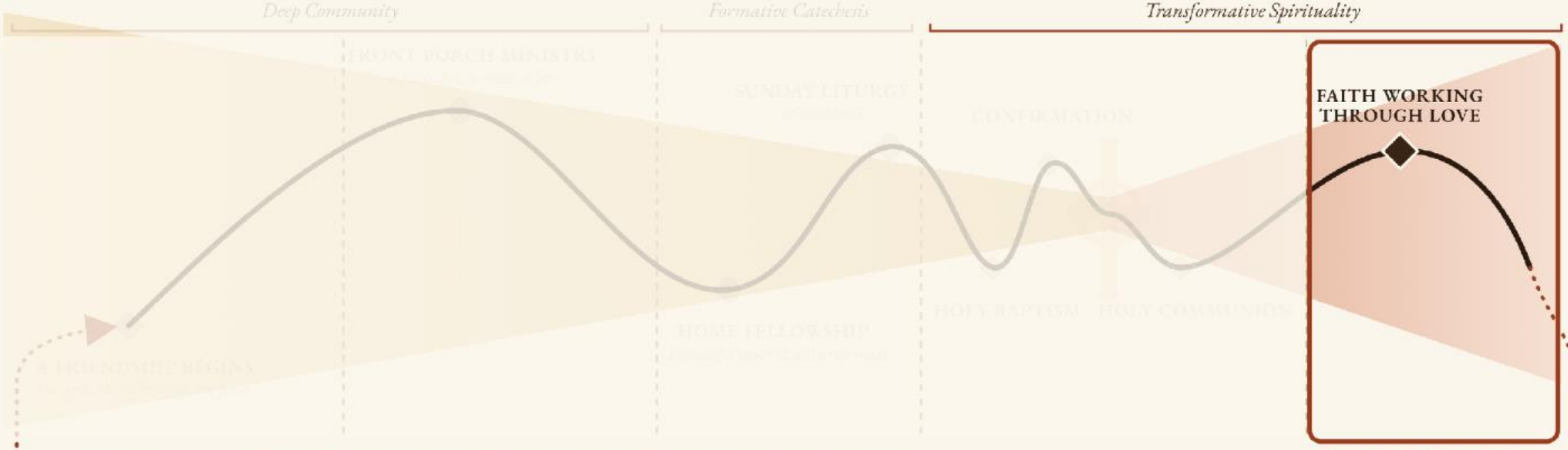
SENT AGAIN
Into the world God loves

Belong.
Deep Community

Believe.
Formative Catechesis

Become.
Transformative Spirituality



GATHERING

SENT

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Start where you are

“We’re too small.”

Smallness does not disqualify a parish from mission.

“We don’t have the money.”

Money cannot buy love, patience, prayer, or presence.

“We only have one priest.”

Mission was never reserved to the clergy.

“Our worship is too strange.”

Inhabit the tradition faithfully; explain it generously.

Four steps

1

Pray and pay attention

Ask God for his heart for your neighbors. Begin with the names on your card.

2

Define your Parish Mile

Name the people, places, and relationships already within reach.

3

One going, one gathering

Something realistic, fitted to your people and your place.

4

Review what you learn

At thirty and ninety days. Let the numbers serve the mission.

AN INVITATION

Form a Going & Gathering Team

- With your rector and vestry, pray and work through the workbook
- Build a plan for your parish, begin in Advent, and carry it out
- Report back to this Synod next year: stories, not only numbers



Going & Gathering Parish Workbook · Seven sessions · 90-day plan

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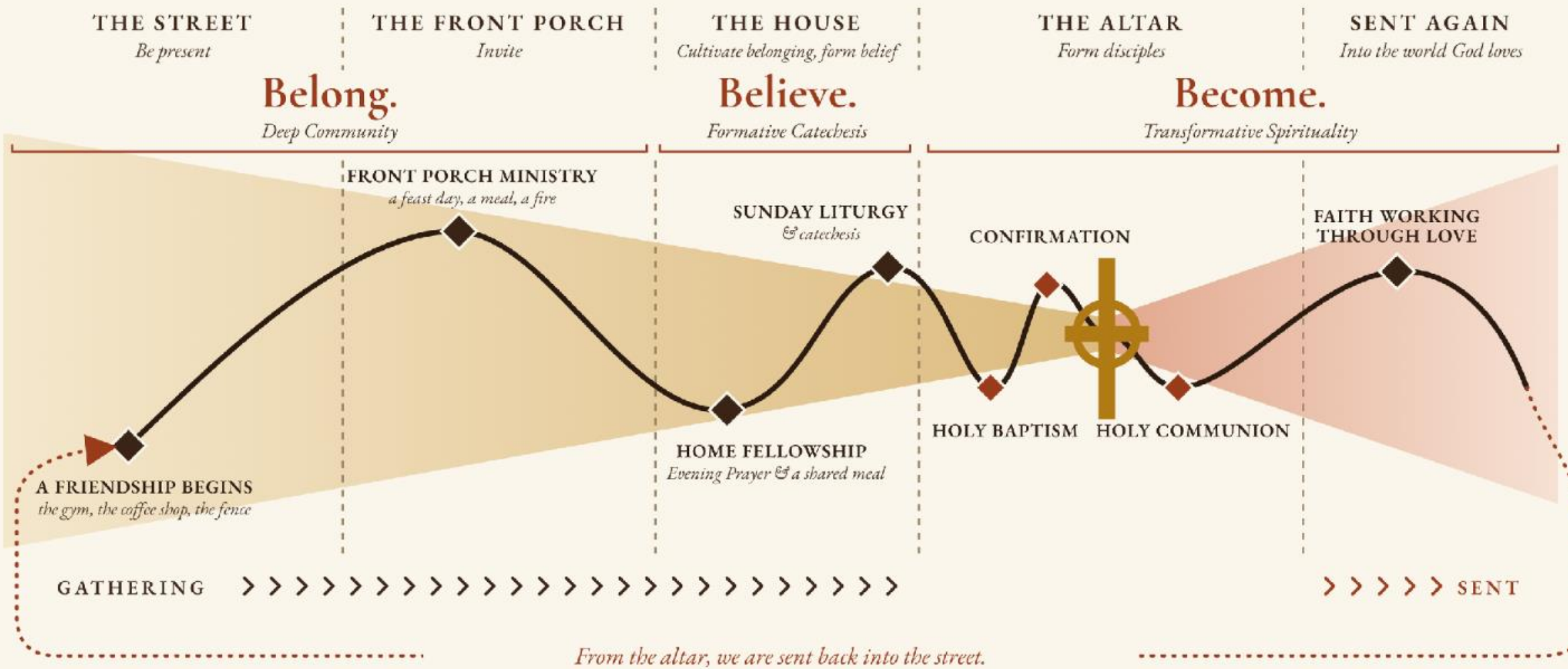

From the altar, we are sent back into the street.

O God, who hast made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the whole earth, and didst send thy blessed Son to preach peace to them that are far off and to them that are nigh; Grant that all men everywhere may seek after thee and find thee; bring the nations into thy fold; pour out thy Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten thy kingdom; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**