TWO TEACHINGS AND A WORKBOOK FOR THE PARISH

Going & Gathering

Reclaiming Mission · The Small (Effective) Church · The Parish Workbook

PART I
Recovering the Missional Heart of God

PART II
Deploying the Gifts God Has Given

PART III
The Parish Workbook

The Rev. Canon Michael D. Vinson

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

ABOUT THIS EDITION

These are the manuscripts of two teachings given at the NEMA Synod of the Reformed Episcopal Church on November 5 and 6, 2026, with the slides that accompanied them set into the text. The first, *Reclaiming Mission: Going & Gathering*, sets out why the Church is missional and offers a simple map for any parish. The second, *The Small (Effective) Church*, is a workshop for parishes that believe they are too small for mission. The third part is the *Going & Gathering* Parish Workbook, seven sessions to lead a rector, vestry, and Going & Gathering Team from the Parish Mile to a ninety-day plan.

The Part I handout and the Part II worksheets are reproduced at the back for parishes that wish to work through the exercises together. Both slide decks are available as PowerPoint files that parishes may adapt, and the workbook is also available on its own for printing.

The icon of Christ and Abbot Menas (Bawit, Egypt, sixth century) is in the Musée du Louvre, Paris, Department of Egyptian Antiquities, inv. E 11565.

Contents

PART I · RECLAIMING MISSION: GOING & GATHERING

I The Question Beneath Our Questions 5
II The Sending God 7
III Heart Precedes Hands 10
IV Going and Gathering: The Map of the Great Supper 12
V Four Objections 26
VI Begin Where You Are 27
Conclusion 28
Notes 30

PART II · THE SMALL (EFFECTIVE) CHURCH

Opening 33
I Reframe: The Story We Have Inherited 35
II Diagnose: Why Are We Small? 38
III Discover: The Gifts of a Small Parish 40
IV Deploy: From Limitations to Solutions 43
Closing: Gather Up the Fragments 47
Notes 48

PART III · THE GOING & GATHERING PARISH WORKBOOK

Seven sessions, a 30-day check-in, and a 90-day review 49

APPENDIX

Part I Handout · Part II Worksheets 82

PART I

Reclaiming Mission

Going & Gathering

Recovering the Missional Heart of God

NEMA Synod · November 5, 2026

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

JOHN 20:21

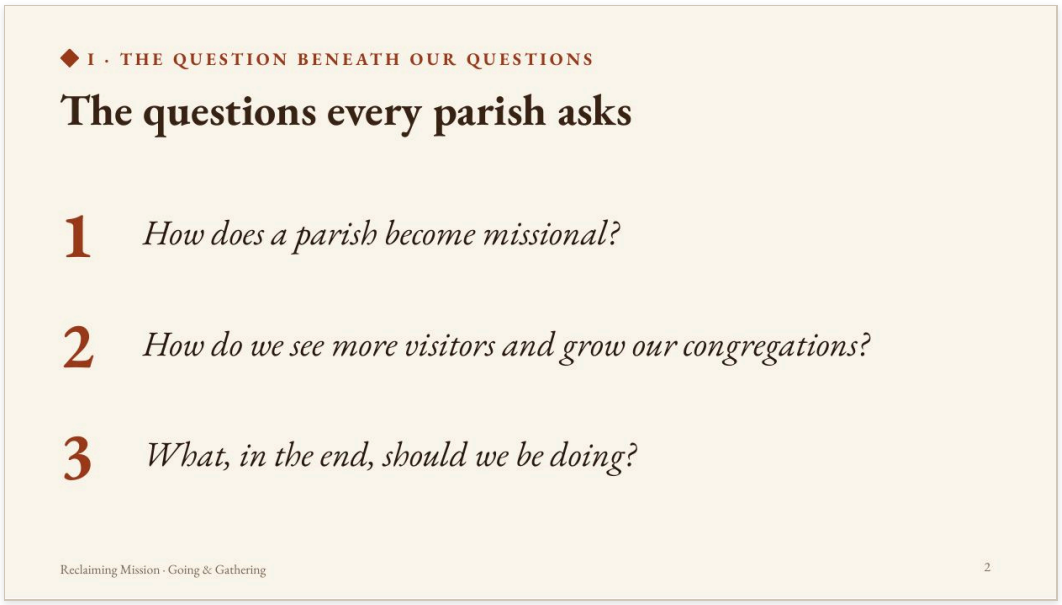
◆ I

The Question Beneath Our Questions

A few years ago, I spent two weeks in England and Scotland with a company of fellow clergy. We walked the streets in our cassocks, and for the most part, we were the only clergy we saw. What we did see were the churches. Again and again we passed the old parish churches — once beacons of the faith — standing locked. Some had been abandoned. Others had become community centers or fair-trade markets. Only the great cathedrals still kept their doors open to the public.

Christians built every one of those parish churches, believing they had been sent to that place with the Gospel for the souls who lived within the sound of its bells. For centuries they baptized, married, and buried the people of their parish. Now many of them stand as haunting monuments to a cherished past, beautiful and silent, their doors shut to the very streets they were built to serve.

I came home with a question many still ask: How does a church become a locked door? It does not happen in a day. No vestry ever votes to stop being sent. It happens slowly, almost imperceptibly, when a congregation forgets why it was planted and begins to live for itself. Brothers and sisters, we are not in England. But no parish is beyond that slow forgetting — not even ours.



SLIDE 2 *Three Questions*

And so we ask the questions every parish eventually asks. *How does a parish become missional? How do we see more visitors and grow our congregations? What, in the end, should we be doing?*

I have asked them as a parish priest and as a church planter. I suspect everyone in this room has asked them as well—perhaps late at night, perhaps poring over the parish budget, perhaps looking out on a pew that used to be full. Sometimes they arise from decline; sometimes from a long, comfortable stability that has

never quite reached past its own doors; and sometimes from a flourishing parish that longs to give more of itself away. Whatever their source, they are honest questions, and we should want what they want: neighbors who hear the Gospel, parishes that make disciples, a Church in which people discover the life of Christ.

But I suggest we usually begin one step too late. Before we ask what we should do, we must remember who we are. Before we reach for strategies and programs, we must recover the missional heart of God. Before we ask how to bring people in, we must remember we were first sent out.

Decline can be a severe mercy. It can expose our assumptions and shake us from complacency. But it can also frighten us — and frightened churches turn inward, to guard what remains. Then mission and evangelism become a remedy for congregational anxiety: a way to keep the lights on, quell our fears, and preserve the things we love. These things matter. But fear is a poor fuel for advancing the Kingdom of God. It burns hot, and it burns out.

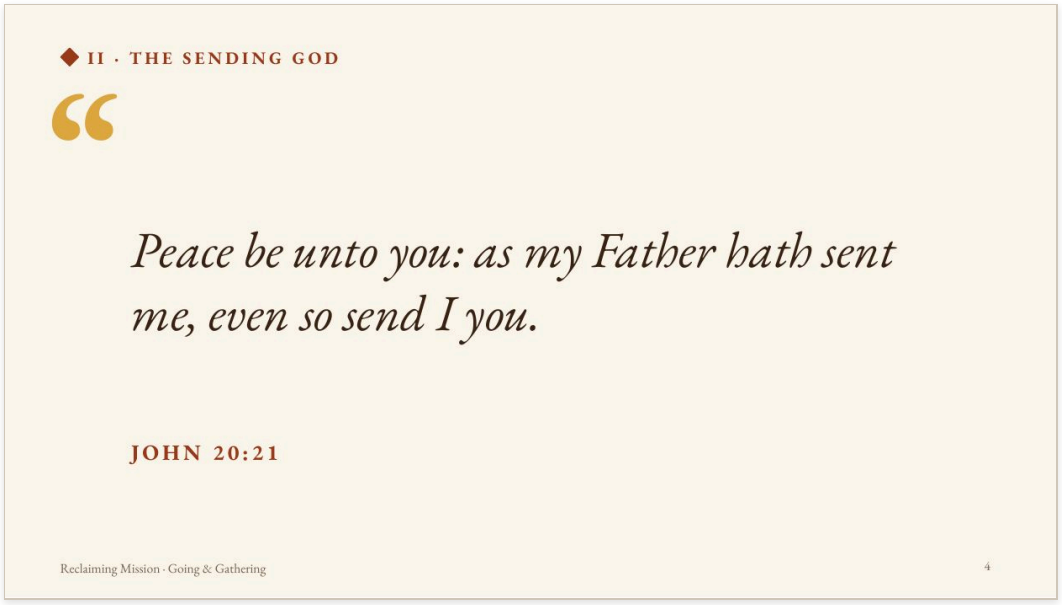


SLIDE 3 *The Church Is Missional Because God Is Missional*

The Church does not become missional because it is declining. The Church is missional because God is missional. I want to make that case from Scripture, from the Fathers, and from our own Prayer Book. Then I want to give you something to carry home: a simple missional planning guide any parish can use, whatever its size, resources, or circumstances.

◆ II

The Sending God

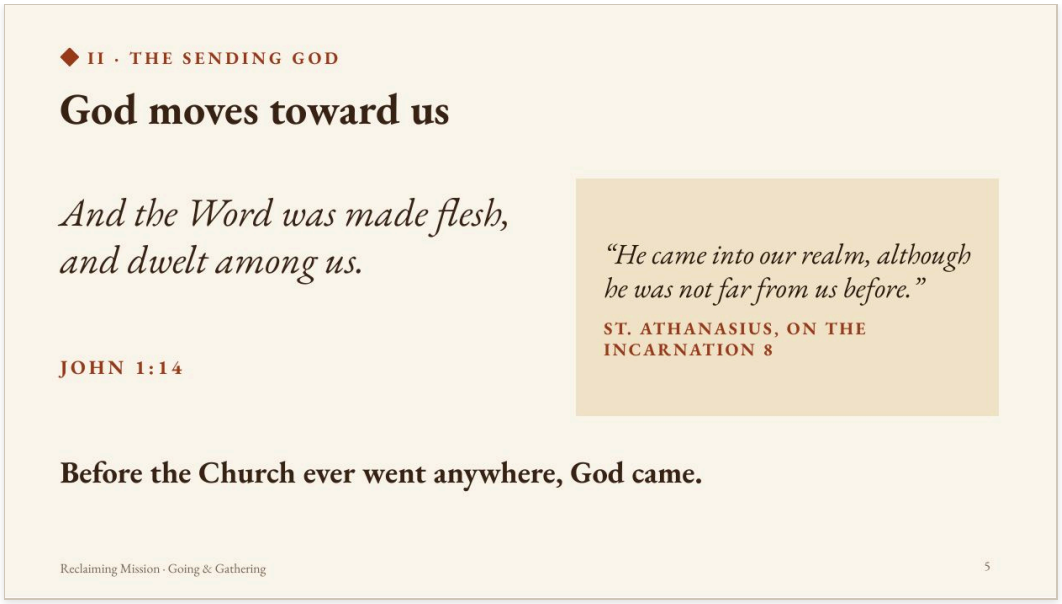


SLIDE 4 *"As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." John 20:21*

On the evening of the first Easter Day, St. John tells us the disciples were assembled behind closed doors out of fear. Consider that. The first Christian congregation was a locked room full of frightened people. And Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said:

> *Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. (John 20:21)*

Mission begins there. Not within a parish vestry or a diocesan initiative, and certainly not with a worry about attendance. It begins in the life of God himself. The Father sends the Son. The Father and the Son send the Holy Ghost. And the risen Son, breathing that Spirit upon his Church, sends us. Theologians call it the *Missio Dei*, God's mission. We did not conceive or design it. We have been swept up into it.



SLIDE 5 *God Moves Toward Us*

St. Athanasius, in his great treatise *On the Incarnation*, tells us that the Word of God came into our world — and then he adds, almost in passing, that he was never far from us before.[1] The One who upholds all things did not need to travel to reach us. And yet he came.

> *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. (John 1:14)*

He did not wait at the edge of creation for creation to come looking for him. He came down. He came near. He took our flesh, walked our roads, sat at our tables, and wept at our graves. Before the Church ever went anywhere, God came. And every going of ours is only an echo of his.

Watch him in the Gospels. He calls fishermen at their nets, and Matthew at the receipt of custom. He sits, wearied with his journey, by a well in Samaria and asks a woman of doubtful reputation for a drink. He stops beneath a sycamore in Jericho, looks up, and invites himself to supper: *Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.* He eats with those whose company scandalizes the respectable.[2] He does not keep a safe distance from the people who need him. No. He moves toward them. And his friendships are not incidental to his ministry; they are the very road along which it travels. He calls men into his company, teaches them on the way, eats with them, bears with their misunderstandings, and then — sends them.

So we do not love our neighbors because we hope they will join the parish. We love them because God so loved the world. We do not enter our communities in search of prospects. We enter them because Christ has already gone before us there.



SLIDE 6 *Mission Is Who We Are*

At the 55th General Council of the Reformed Episcopal Church in 2017, Bishop Sutton set before us the REC100 vision: that mission should stand at the center of everything we are and do.[3] It called every parish to understand itself as a missional community, with both the potential and the responsibility to share in planting new congregations.

But REC100 was never only about planting new parishes. It summoned us to recover our missionary identity. A Christian is missional by definition, because baptism into the Body of the One who was sent makes us so. Not every Christian is called to be a missionary by vocation, and not every parishioner has the same gifts. But every baptized soul shares in the Church's evangelistic 'sentness' — through prayer, holiness, service, hospitality, friendship, and the plain confession of the hope that is in us.

Mission, then, is not one ministry among many, competing for a line in the budget. **Mission is the horizon within which every ministry finds its purpose** — the altar guild and the choir, the vestry and the coffee hour, the Sunday school, and the Daily Office prayed by two faithful souls on a Tuesday morning. The Missio Dei belongs to the home fellowship meeting in a living room and to the historic parish on the green; to the rural congregation and the city church; to the parish that is growing and the parish that is not.

And when we recover that conviction, our questions begin to change. We stop asking only, *How do we get people to come to us?* We begin to ask, *How do we go toward our neighbors, bear the Gospel among them, and bring them to the Lord's Table?*

◆ III

Heart Precedes Hands



SLIDE 7 *Heart Precedes Hands*

We can launch evangelistic programs, train volunteers, organize events, and print a hundred brochures. But if the fears we named at the start are what drive them, they will fade. **Mission must flow from a heart formed by the love of God overflowing to the lost.** The heart precedes the hands.

That does not mean waiting until we feel inspired, or 'missional'. Christian obedience usually begins like a mustard seed: a small step of faithfulness—a prayer, a meal, an invitation—and God forms our hearts along the way. Yet every strategy must be rooted in love: love for those far from Christ, for those the Church has wounded, for the curious and the skeptical, and for the multitude who have simply never been invited.

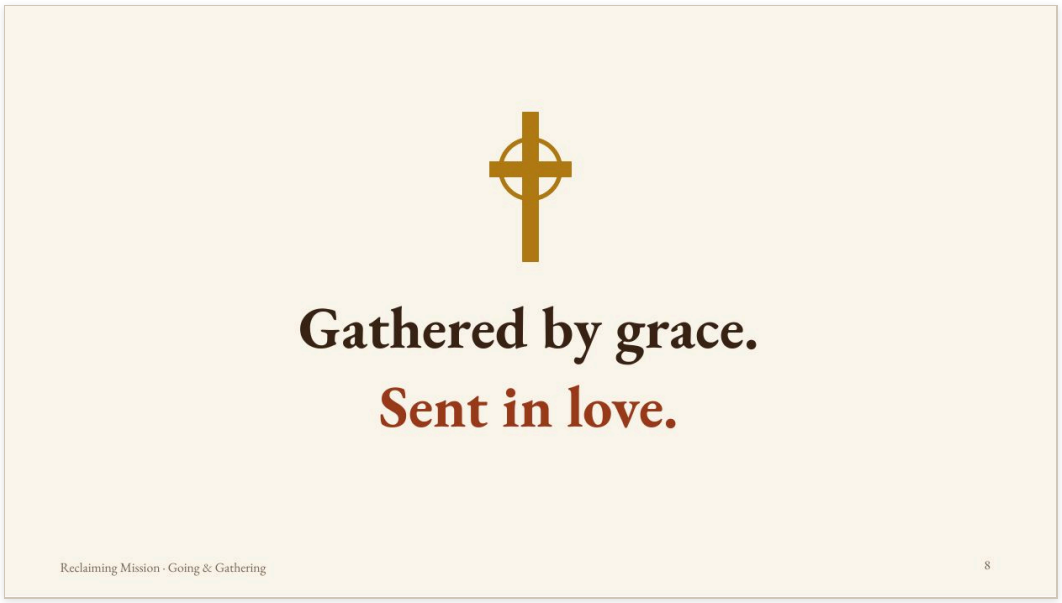
Where is such a heart formed? For us, where it has always been formed: on our knees, with the Prayer Book open, and the sacramental life. The Daily Office teaches us, morning and evening, to pray for all sorts and conditions of men. The Psalter gives us words for every human joy and grief, every sin and every hope. And at the Holy Communion, having received the Body and Blood of Christ, we pray words that every person in this room knows by heart:

> *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.*[4]

That is the first missionary act of every Christian: self-offering at the altar. And then, in the Prayer of Thanksgiving, we ask our heavenly Father so to assist us with his grace

that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in.

Mark that: the good works are *already prepared*. Meaning, the road is already laid. We do not rise from the Lord's Table to develop a mission. We rise to walk into the mission of God.

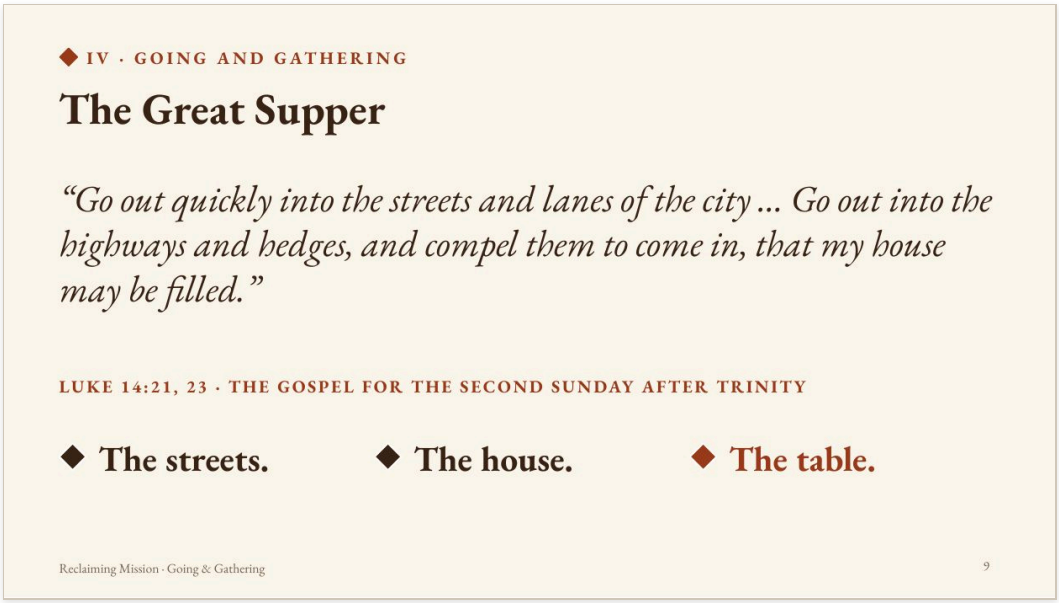


SLIDE 8 *Gathered by Grace. Sent in Love.*

A missional parish, then, is not necessarily a busy parish. It is a parish whose common life is ordered toward God, and whose people are formed, Lord's Day by Lord's Day, to love the world God loves. Our worship forms our witness. Our prayer sustains our going. The people we are becoming through the Prayer Book are the people our neighbors will meet on Monday, and Tuesday, and so on. **We are a people gathered by grace and sent in love.**

◆ IV

Going and Gathering: The Map of the Great Supper



SLIDE 9 *The Great Supper · Luke 14:16–23*

Now to the practical question: how do we begin? I want to offer a framework simple enough for any parish to embrace and adaptable enough for any parish to use. But I did not invent it. Our Lord prepared his map long before any of us.

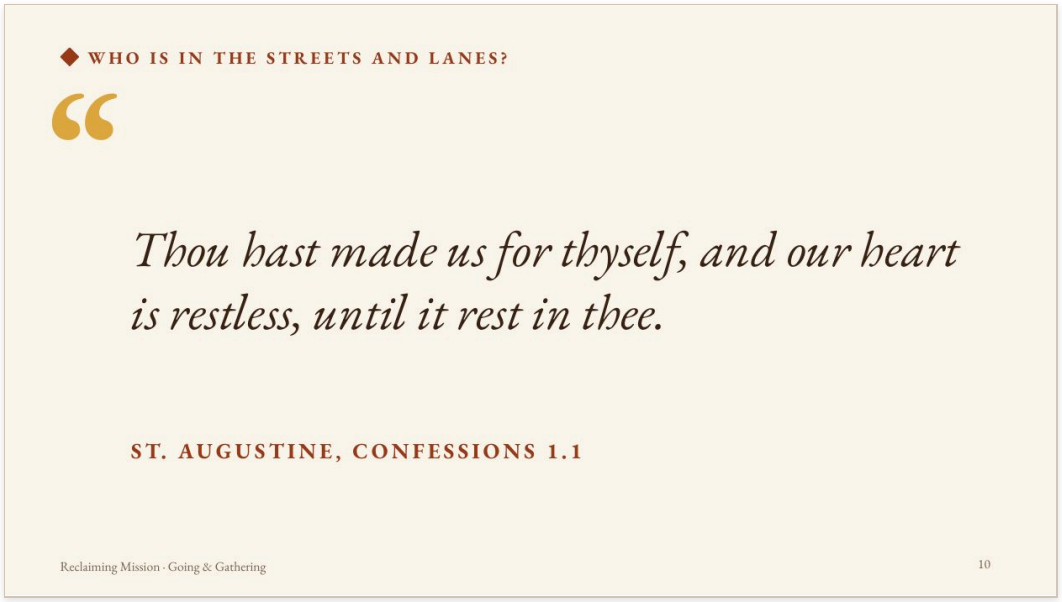
In the Gospel appointed for the Second Sunday after Trinity, a certain man made a great supper, and bade many. And when the invited guests began with one consent to make excuse, he did not cancel the feast. He said to his servant:

> *Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. … Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. (Luke 14:21, 23)*

The streets. The house. The table. Going, and gathering. It is a parable we have been reading for a very long time. We should pause and consider one word: *compel*. *St. Augustine, in a bitter controversy with the Donatists, came to read that word as warrant for the Empire's coercion of schismatics — and later centuries took up his reading with consequences he never imagined.*[5]

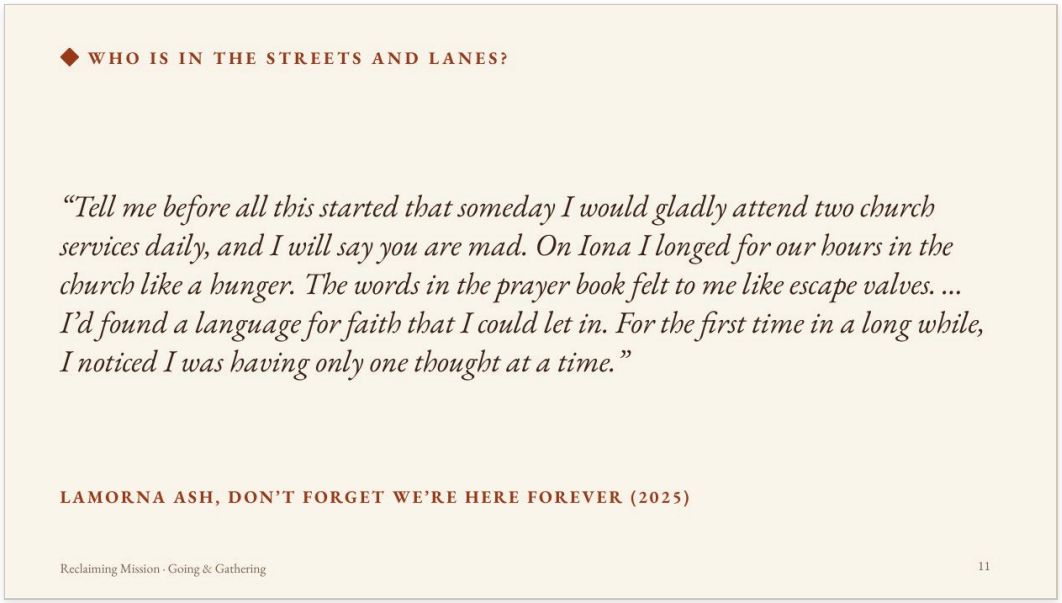
But this parable's compulsion is not the compulsion of the sword. It is the compulsion of a host who will not take no for an answer, because the feast is too good and the table too empty. This is what St. Paul means when he says, *"The love of Christ compels (synecho) us" (2 Corinthians 5:14).*[6] **Love compels us to ask: who**

is in the streets and lanes?



SLIDE 10 *"Our heart is restless, until it rest in thee."*

Our neighbors, for the most part, are not angry at God. They are tired. They are hurried and distracted, endlessly connected and profoundly alone, curating lives that never quite feel like their own. Sociologists speak of acceleration and burnout;[7] the Fathers simply called it restlessness. St. Augustine said it once for every age: *Thou hast made us for thyself, and our heart is restless, until it rest in thee.*[8]

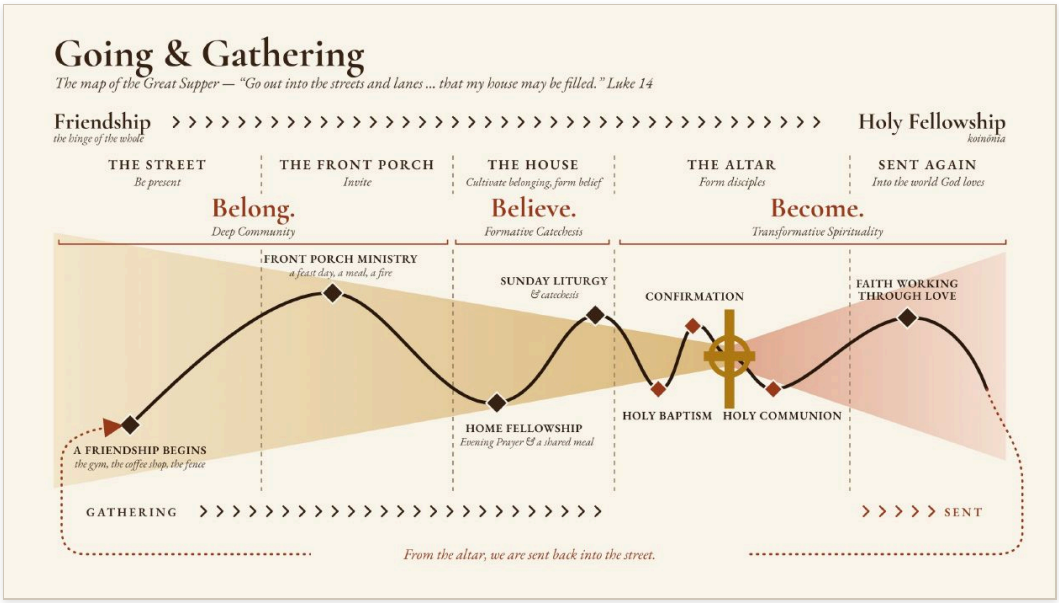


SLIDE 11 *Lamorna Ash on Iona*

> *"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. Each verse we spoke in chorus, it was as if some new guilt or hurt was released from my body. 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* (Bloomsbury, 2025)[9]

This is the testimony of a secular journalist who journeyed to Iona, a Celtic place where the veil between heaven and earth is thin. She arrived heartsick and burned out, expecting nothing. The ancient liturgy did what no argument ever could. One thought at a time. Her fragmented self momentarily gathered into wholeness by common prayer. This is what we are building. This is why we plant.

Restless people are not looking for a slicker version of what they already have. Many are looking—without knowing the words for it—for exactly what an REC Prayer Book parish offers: rest, rootedness, beauty, a common life, and a God who has drawn near.



SLIDE 12 *The Going & Gathering map*

Let me show you where we are going. This is a map of the Great Supper, drawn from the parable we have just read. Read it from left to right. It traces four places along the servant's road: **the street**, where our neighbors live their ordinary lives; **the front porch**, where they are invited into a little of our common life; **the house**, where they find belonging and are formed in the faith; and **the altar**, the Lord's Table, at the heart of it all. Between the street and the porch stands **friendship**, the hinge on which the whole map turns. And along the bottom runs a line that carries us from the altar back to the street, because those who are gathered in are always sent out again. We will walk this road one place at a time. But first, a word about the three words written across the top.

At St. Benedict's, we order our parish life around three fundamentals: Deep Community, Formative Catechesis, and Transformative Spirituality. We say it more simply: **Belong. Believe. Become.**

Lay those three words over the parable of The Great Banquet, and the map comes into focus. The **street** and the **front porch** are where belonging begins. The **house** is where belief is formed. The **altar** is where we become what we receive. These are not rigid stages that every soul must pass through in order; the Holy Ghost is not so tidy. They are a way of imagining how ordinary, everyday relationships open, step by step, into the life of the Church. And the movement is not a line but a circle: from the altar, we are sent back into the street. The servant wasn't sent into the whole world at once, but into the streets and lanes nearest the master's house. So before we walk this map, we must find our starting place.

1. Begin with your Parish Mile



SLIDE 13 *Where Has God Placed Us? Your Parish Mile*

Do not begin with a diocesan campaign. Start with the people and places God has already put within reach of our parishes, and, by extension, our parishioners' homes. What lies within a mile of your church — what streets and apartment blocks, schools and shops, parks and pubs? Where do our parishioners work, shop, eat, exercise, and volunteer? Who lives within sight of your bell tower and has never once crossed the parish threshold?

I call this your **Parish Mile**. It need not be a literal mile. In a city it may be four streets; in the country, half a county; for some parishes, the truest mission field will be relational rather than geographical. The point is to move from the abstraction called "the community" to actual names, actual places, actual people for whom your parish will take particular responsibility before God.

And look at what God has already placed among you: the parishioner who teaches at the elementary school, the one who serves on the town council, the one who knows every shop owner on Main Street. Mission rarely begins by creating something new. It usually begins by noticing what God has already given, and where he has placed his Church.



SLIDE 14 *Your Parish Mile: Three Places, Three Names*

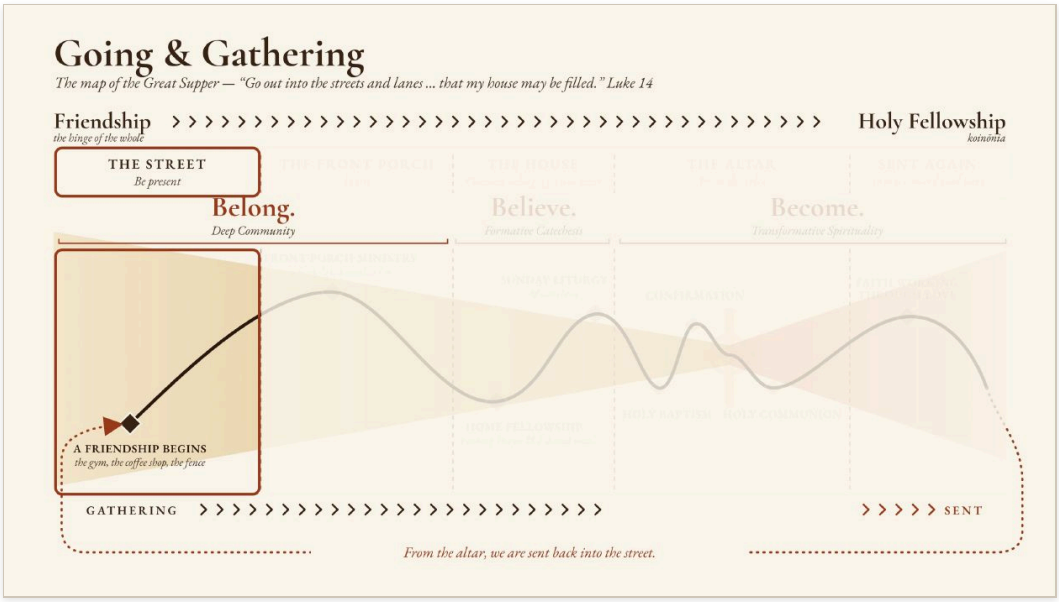
EXERCISE · 90 SECONDS. CARDS AND PENS AT EACH SEAT.

Your Parish Mile: Three Places, Three Names

"Take the handout in front of you. Write down three places within a mile of your church where you have never been seen. Then, write the names of three people you will pray for, by name, every day this week. Keep the handout in front of you. We will come back to it."

Hold on to that handout. Those three places and those three names are your street, and every journey on this map begins there.

2. The Street: Be Present



SLIDE 15 *The map · the street*

The street is ordinary life: the office, the gym, the coffee shop, the school pick-up line, the neighbor over the fence. Our first task there is not to turn every encounter into an evangelistic pitch. It is to be genuinely and unhurriedly present.

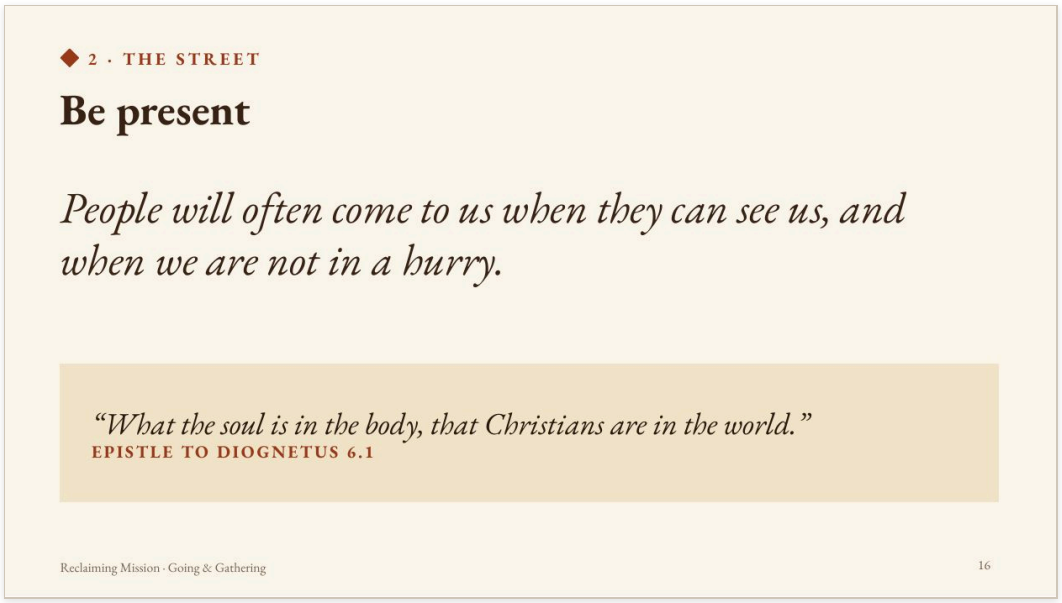
The ancient *Epistle to Diognetus*[10] observes that Christians are not marked out from their neighbors by country, or language, or dress. They live in their own cities, eat the common food, keep the common customs — and yet they live there as sojourners, and what the soul is to the body, the Christians are to the world. Not a separate enclave but soul, quietly giving life from within.

Two centuries later, the Emperor Julian, who hated the faith and labored to revive the old gods, complained bitterly in a letter that the "Galileans" were winning the Empire because they cared not only for their own poor but for ours as well.[11] The most effective evangelism the ancient world ever saw was mostly ordinary charity, done by ordinary Christians, on ordinary streets.

But on that same trip, I learned something else. One evening, outside a lively pub in Durham, a young man, pint in hand, with several others behind him, stopped me. “Hey — are you a priest?” "I am. What's your name?” “Michael. What's yours, Father?” “Michael as well.” He was delighted and offered a high-five he very nearly landed.

“A Michael, just like me — like the archangel!” And then, more quietly: “But I’m a little bit atheist as well, Father. I hope that’s okay?” “It is,” I said. “There’s a little bit of atheist in everyone.” And we both laughed. Then we stood there on the pavement and talked a while longer.

Within a minute of meeting me, that young man confessed his unbelief, and in the same breath, the memory of a faith he once held welled up. It lay just beneath the skin. And what brought it to the surface was simple. He could see me, and I was in no hurry to be anywhere else.

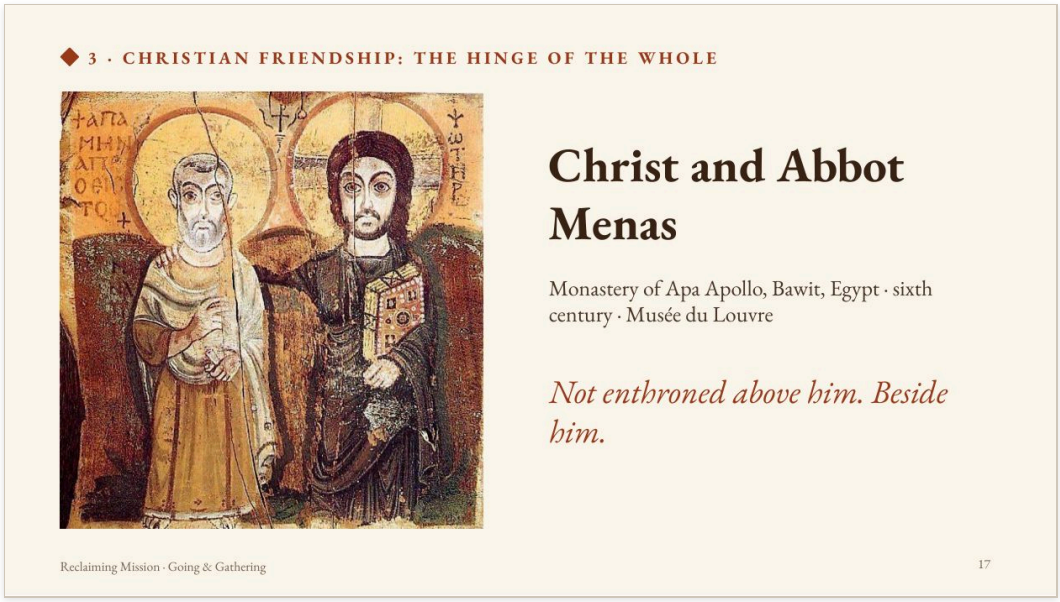


SLIDE 16 *The Street: Be Present*

People will often come to us when they can see us, and when we are not in a hurry. So learn people's names. Listen to their stories. Ask questions and wait for the answers. Be the person who is available in the crisis, who shows up at the hospital, who sends the note after the funeral. Moments of loss and transition often bring the deepest questions to the surface. Christian friendship never exploits those moments. It simply offers the presence and consolation of Christ. I ask, where in this world will people find consolation apart from Christ and his church?

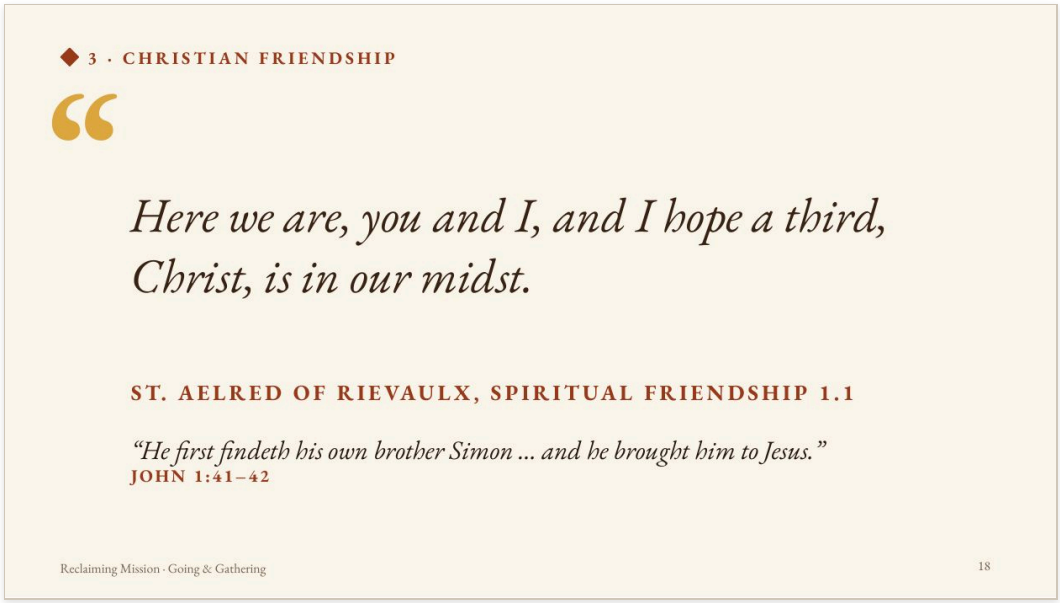
Not every parishioner will lead an apologetics class or win a debate with a skeptic. But every Christian can pay attention, pray for a neighbor, and give an answer for the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear.[12] And when we linger long enough in the street, something begins that no program can manufacture. A neighbor becomes a friend.

3. Christian Friendship: The Hinge of the Whole



SLIDE 17 *Christ and Abbot Menas, Bawit, sixth century · Musée du Louvre, Paris*

On the screen is one of the oldest icons we possess. It comes from a monastery at Bawit in Egypt, painted perhaps fourteen hundred years ago, and it hangs today in the Louvre.[13] It is often called the icon of friendship. Look at it for a moment. Christ stands beside Abbot Menas, holding the Gospel—and his arm rests on Menas's shoulder. Not enthroned above him. Beside him. Walking with him in friendship.



SLIDE 18 *"Here we are, you and I, and I hope a third, Christ, is in our midst."*

Our Lord said to his disciples, *Henceforth I call you not servants … but I have called you friends* (John 15:15). And St. Aelred of Rievaulx, the Cistercian abbot of Yorkshire, opens his dialogue on spiritual friendship with words I have always loved: *Here we are, you and I, and I hope a third, Christ, is in our midst.*[14]

In a fragmented and lonely age, friendship may be the most natural place in this world for someone to meet the love of Christ.

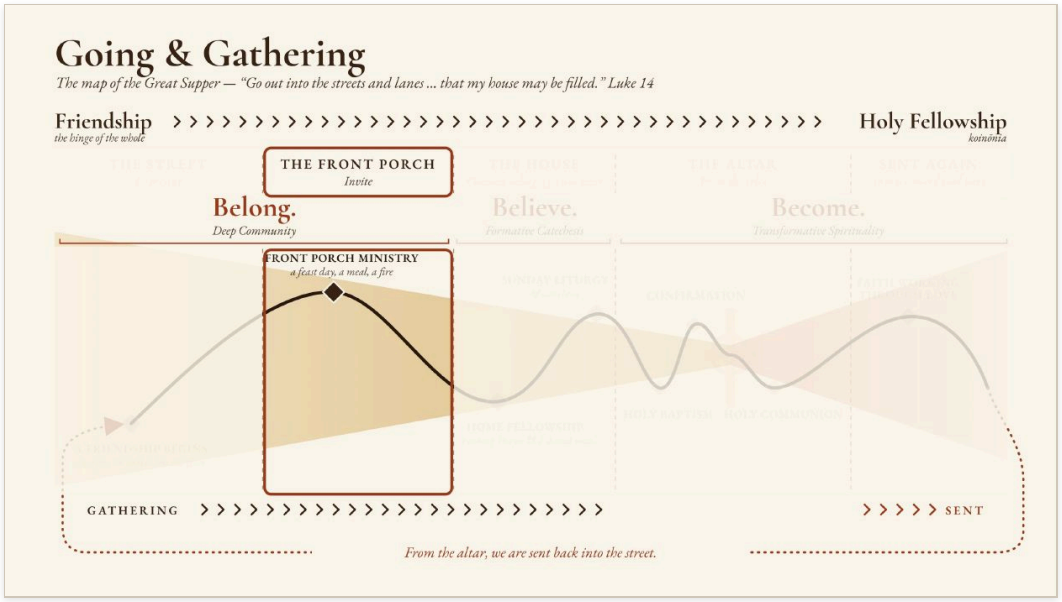
And notice the very first thing that happened after Jesus called his first disciples. St. John tells us that St. Andrew *first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah." And he brought him to Jesus* (John 1:41–42). Within days Philip is saying to Nathanael, simply, *Come and see.* The Church's first evangelism was a brother fetching his brother, and a friend inviting a friend. We'll keep St. Andrew's Day in a few weeks; he may well be the patron saint of everything I am saying today.

But hear this clearly: friendship is not a technique for converting acquaintances into members. People can always tell when they are a 'missional project'. And yet real friendship, because it is real, will make room for honesty about the things that matter most — a word about our faith when it is asked for, an invitation to dinner, to a parish book club, to Evening Prayer, to the Holy Communion; an honest "I don't know" when we don't; and, when a friend is suffering, not passing by a person's grief with scriptural platitudes, but entering into their sorrow with presence, patience, and prayer.

This vision of friendship evangelism requires no budget, no event, no additional staff position. It does require Christians who understand that their daily friendships are places where the love of God can become visible. Each of our lives is an open invitation into friendship with God.

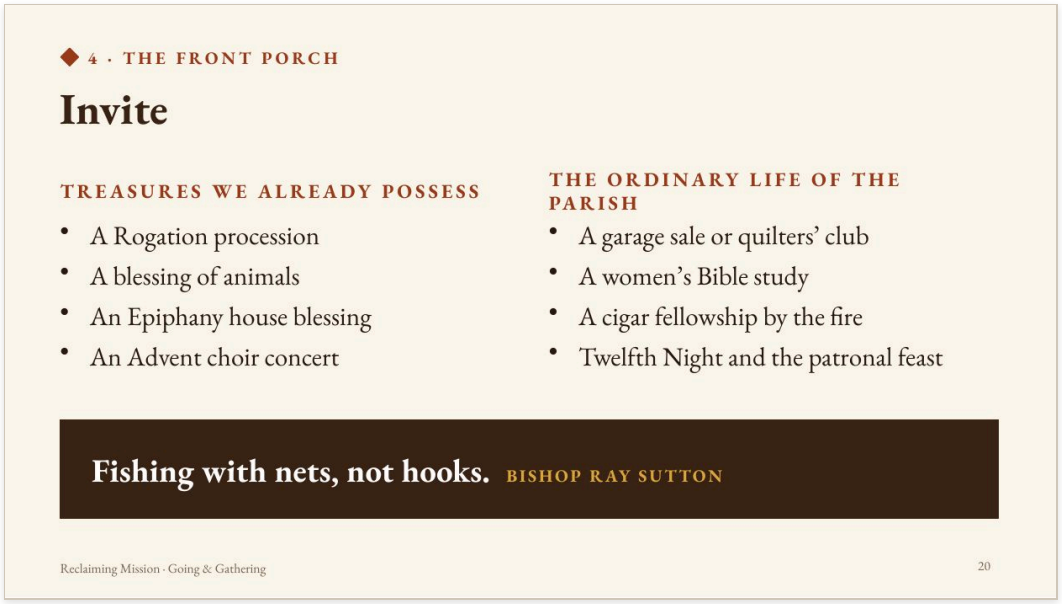
Yet friendship cannot carry the whole weight alone. Sooner or later a friend must be invited somewhere: to a meal, a feast, a fire. That is the front porch.

4. The Front Porch: Invite



SLIDE 19 *The map · the front porch*

The front porch invites people into a little more of our common parish life: a meal, coffee, a neighborhood gathering, a feast day, an afternoon serving side by side. We call these *front porch ministries*. They let people draw near before they believe, before they embrace our Reformed Catholic way, before they step across the threshold into the full life of the parish.



SLIDE 20 *The Front Porch: Invite*

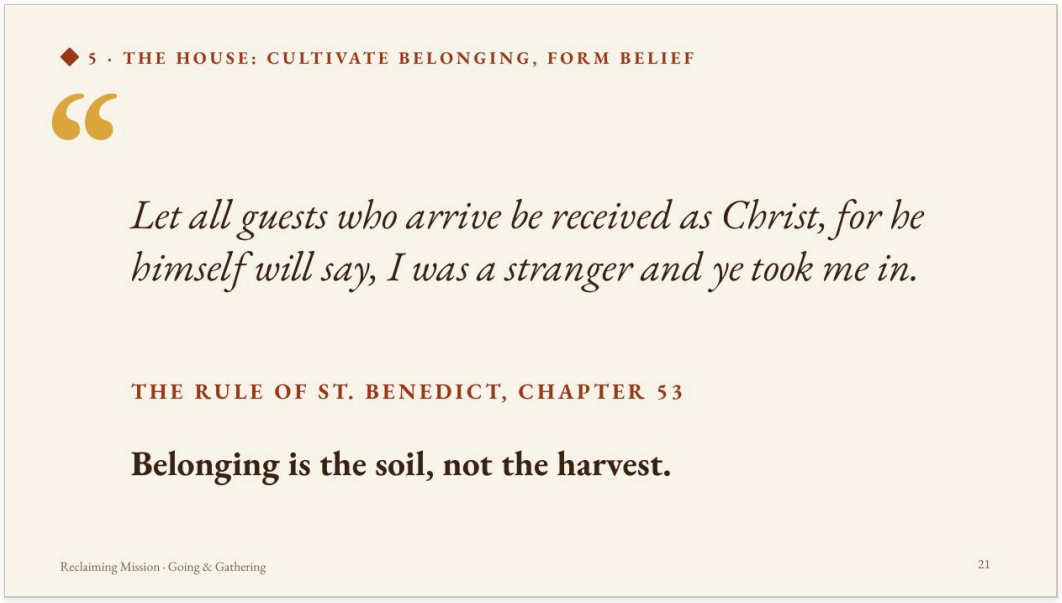
Here, we should first draw on the treasures we already possess. A Rogation procession through the neighborhood. A blessing of the animals at a public park on St. Francis's Day. A house blessing inviting friends and family at Epiphany. An Advent choir concert. And alongside these, the ordinary gatherings of parish life: a garage sale, a quilters' club, a women's Bible study, a monthly cigar fellowship around a fire on the church grounds.

At St. Benedict's, our Twelfth Night Festival and our patronal feast are not marketing events designed to draw a crowd. They are our common life, with the doors open wide. Bishop Sutton calls this fishing with nets rather than hooks. Every front porch ministry is a square in the net. The more squares, the bigger the net; the bigger the net, the greater the catch. And we cast the net in the open: no bait, no hidden agenda, only the life of the Church, seen and experienced.

But an event is not evangelism; it is an opening for relationships to begin. So before you plan the event, plan the welcome. Who will greet the newcomer? Who will sit with them? Who will call them the next week? A full hall that leads nowhere is a missed supper.

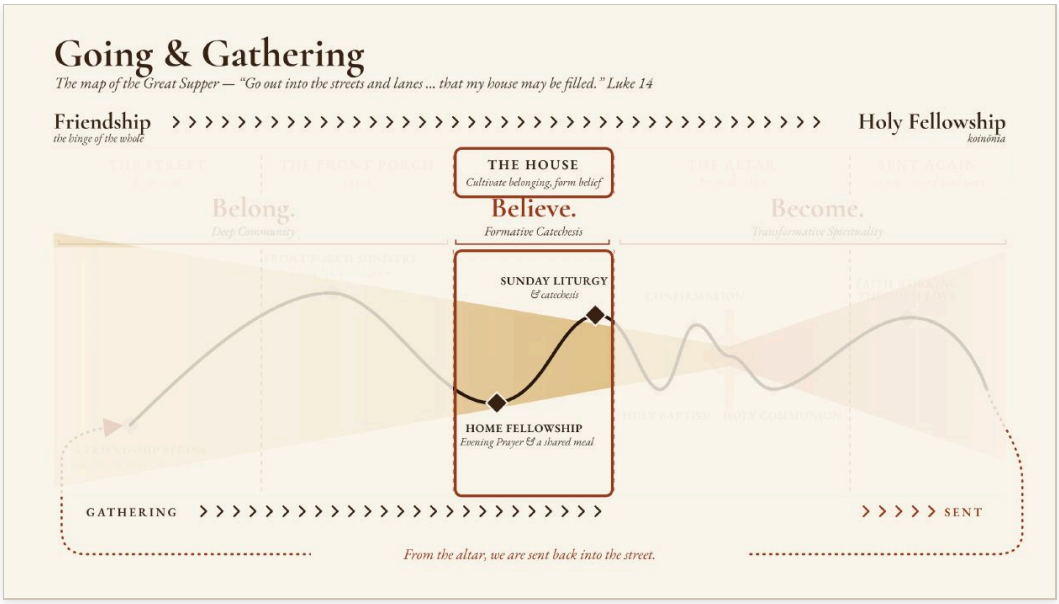
A porch is a threshold, not a destination. Those who linger there must be welcomed further in, into the house.

5. The House: Cultivate Belonging, Form Belief



SLIDE 21 *The House: "Let all guests who arrive be received as Christ."*

St. Benedict, in the fifty-third chapter of his Rule, says: *Let all guests who arrive be received as Christ, for he himself will say, I was a stranger and ye took me in.*[15] That sentence should stand over the door of every parish in the Reformed Episcopal Church.



SLIDE 22 *The map · the house*

The house invites deeper belonging: real relationships, common practices, shared life. Home fellowships are especially fruitful here — a household gathering for Evening Prayer or Family Prayer from the Prayer Book, a shared meal, a reading of the lessons, prayer for one another. So are parish meals, men's and women's gatherings, study groups, and catechesis cohorts, which give newcomers a place to explore the Christian faith and ask questions without being hurried toward an answer.

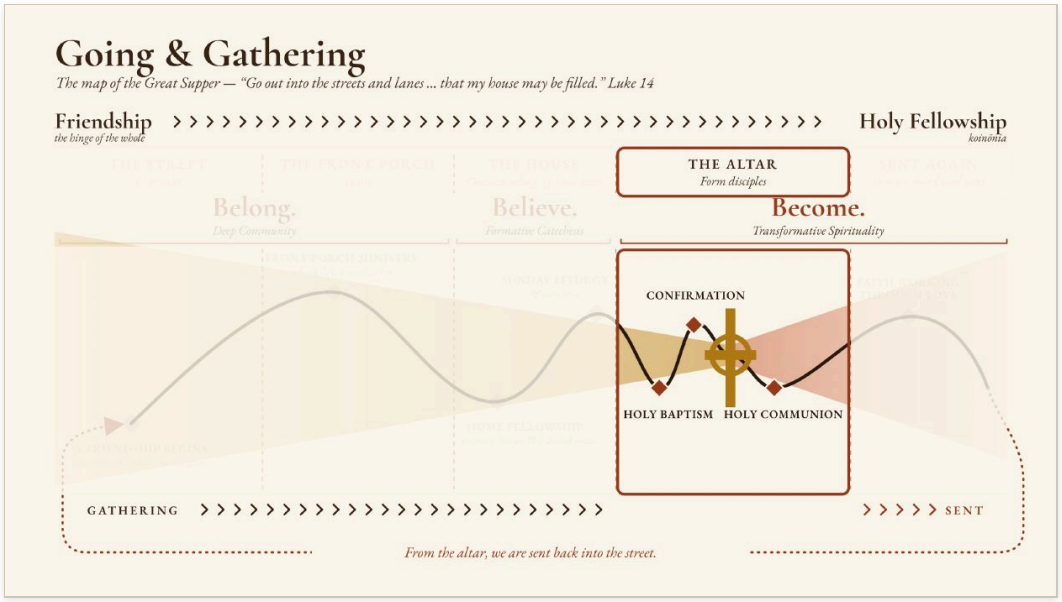
For many, belonging will come before believing.[16] That does not mean belief is unimportant, that the Church should hide its convictions, or that everyone we welcome is thereby a Christian without professing faith through the grace of holy baptism. It means we do not demand that people resolve every question before they may come into the house. We welcome them honestly, and we let them see what Anglican life looks like up close.

But belonging is the soil, not the harvest. People must hear the Gospel. They need Scripture, the Creeds, the Catechism, and the patient company of those who will walk with them through what can be a long, uncertain season—the liminal journey between an old way of seeing and a new one. Our task is not to rush people through it. It is to accompany them faithfully until the truth of Christ takes hold.

This is where a parish's culture moves from abstract to real. We cannot ask our people to make friends in the street if the parish will not receive those friends when they come. So ask honestly: Are we making room in the house? Does someone explain the service without overwhelming the visitor? Do we introduce newcomers beyond the one person who invited them? Do we follow up? Is there room for those still asking questions?

And all of it—every welcome, every question, every patient year of company— leads somewhere: to the table the Master has prepared.

6. The Altar: Form Disciples



SLIDE 23 *The map · the altar*

The altar, the Lord's Table, is the heart and center of the house. **The street, the porch, and the house are not ends in themselves; every one of them leads here.** We are servants sent out by a Master who has prepared a supper, and our message is his: *Come; for all things are now ready.*



SLIDE 24 *The Altar: "Come; for all things are now ready."*

Every invitation ultimately leads here — to the Gospel, to catechesis, to Holy Baptism and Confirmation, to the Holy Communion, and to the long transformation of a life lived in Christ. This is what makes the framework not merely Christian but recognizably Anglican. 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. So we teach the faith, welcome honest inquiry, and help people understand what they are seeing and receiving. Some will come quickly. Others will take years. We accompany them all with patience, clarity, prayer, and love.



SLIDE 25 *The map · sent again*

And here, at the altar, the circle turns. Those gathered in are sent out to *do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in*.

◆ V

Four Objections



SLIDE 26 *Four Objections: Start Where You Are*

Let me answer four objections I often hear. You may have voiced one of them yourself on the drive here today.

"We're too small." Smallness does not disqualify a parish from mission. I sometimes lead church planters and parish revitalizers through a teaching called *The Small (Effective) Church*. I argue that we must stop treating size as the chief measure of faithfulness. We rejoice in growth when God gives it. But a small parish may possess gifts a large one envies: intimacy, flexibility, a strong common life, and the ability to truly know a newcomer by name.

The question for a small parish is not how to imitate a large one with fewer resources, but how to be healthy and fruitful with the people and gifts God has given. And let us be honest: some parishes are small because they have turned inward and quietly closed the porch. Yet, smallness is neither proof of failure nor a guarantee of health. Discern your situation, and respond faithfully.

"We don't have the money." You don't need a budget to invite someone over for dinner, keep a friendship, pray for a neighbor, or start a small group in your home for Evening Prayer. Money can do many things. It cannot buy love, patience, prayer, or presence; the very things Christian mission cannot do without. Remember, without love, evangelism is but a noisy gong and clanging cymbal.[17]

"We only have one priest." Then let that priest do what the Ordinal charges him to do: teach, form, equip, and lead the people of God. Mission was never reserved to the clergy. The priest equips the saints; the saints do the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:12). Every Christian can pray for a neighbor, keep a friendship, of-

fer hospitality, and invite someone to come and see. We do not all have the same gifts, but we all have a place in the mission of God.

"Our worship is too strange for outsiders." This may be the objection we feel most and say least. But our task is not to make classical Prayer Book Anglicanism less distinct in order to make it more accessible. It is to inhabit our tradition faithfully, rubrically, joyfully, and explain it generously. The liturgy, the Daily Office, the sacraments, the Christian liturgical year — these are not obstacles to mission. They are the very life we are inviting people to discover. In a restless age, worship that does not bend the knee to every passing fashion may be precisely what a weary soul has been looking for. The stranger needs the church's liturgy, not the world's liturgy, and a friend beside them in the pew, among the called-out people of Christ.

◆ VI

Begin Where You Are



SLIDE 27 *Begin where you are · four steps*

Let's approach this map one step at a time. You do not need to do everything at once. You need only begin faithfully. Let me offer four steps.

First, pray and pay attention. Ask God to give you his heart for your neighbors. Pray by name for the people who live and work around your church. Notice the relationships God has already placed in your congregants' lives. Begin with the names on your handout.

Second, define your Parish Mile. Walk it, map it, and name the people, places, businesses, institutions, and relationships already within reach.

Third, choose one practice of going and one practice of gathering. Perhaps each of your people will commit to cultivate one friendship with a neighbor. Perhaps the parish will host an Anglican inquirers' group, start a home fellowship, or throw open the doors of a liturgical feast you already keep. Choose something realistic, fitted to your people and your place.

Fourth, review what you learn. After a month, and again at ninety days, ask: What friendships have formed? What have we learned about our neighbors? What doors have opened? Who has come near to the house, or to the altar? Do not measure everything by how many came to an event. Watch whether relationships are deepening, whether real conversations are happening, whether people are being welcomed into Christian community, and whether catechesis and discipleship are taking root. We should still count, and still care for the health of the parish. But the numbers must serve the mission, not replace it.

Conclusion



SLIDE 28 *An invitation · Form a Going & Gathering Team*

And to those lay and clergy who serve at the diocesan level, another question: how shall we cultivate a culture in which parishes expect to share in mission, equip their people for witness, and grow in their capacity to plant new congregations? Not every parish will plant a church soon. Parishes differ in size, maturity, and gifts. But every parish can join in going and gathering, and some will one day become mother churches, sending people, clergy, and resources to begin new missions.

So to every parish, let me offer a proposal. I encourage every parish in this diocese to form a **Going & Gathering Team**: a small group of parishioners who, with the rector and vestry, will pray together, work through the workbook, develop an evangelism plan fitted to their own people and place—and then carry it out. Begin in Advent. Take up the plan over ninety days. And next year, come back to this Synod and tell us what God has done — not with attendance figures alone, but with stories of friendships begun, neighbors met, and souls brought to the Supper of the Lamb.

Your handout includes a **QR code** that links to the *Going & Gathering* workbook, a guide for leading a parish through the process of discerning its Parish Mile, taking stock of its life along the map, and building a ninety-day plan for going and gathering. I encourage every rector, planter, and vestry to use it to support the health of the church and the expansion of God's kingdom.

Friends, our vision must reach beyond preserving what already exists. **We must go to the street. We must open the front porch. We must welcome people into the house. We must gather them to the altar. And from the altar, we are sent out again.** We must dare to imagine what God might yet do through us.

Invite the Synod to stand and pray together.

> *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.**[18]

THE CENTRAL THESIS

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. Our task is to recover God's missional heart, embody it in the shared life of a particular parish, and learn to go and gather through the ordinary relationships and opportunities God has already given us.

Notes

1. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 8. The Word "came into our realm, although he was not far from us before." See *On the Incarnation*, trans. a Religious of C.S.M.V. (London: Mowbray, 1944; repr. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).
2. Matthew 4:18–22 (the fishermen); Matthew 9:9 (Matthew at the receipt of custom); John 4:6–7 (the woman of Samaria); Luke 19:1–10 (Zacchaeus); Luke 15:1–2 ("This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them").
3. The 55th General Council of the Reformed Episcopal Church met in Dallas, Texas, in June 2017, where Bishop Ray R. Sutton was elected Presiding Bishop.
4. *The Book of Common Prayer* (1928): the Prayer for All Conditions of Men (Morning Prayer); the Prayer of Consecration, "And here we offer and present unto thee…" (cf. Romans 12:1); and the Prayer of Thanksgiving after Communion, "…do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in" (cf. Ephesians 2:10).
5. Augustine and *compelle intrare***.** The Donatists were a North African schismatic church that broke from Catholic communion in the early fourth century, holding that clergy who had surrendered the Scriptures under Diocletian's persecution had invalidated their sacraments. At first, Augustine opposed imperial force against them, holding that faith cannot be compelled. After Honorius's Edict of Unity (405), he saw many Donatists return to communion under pressure, and he changed his view. In Letter 93 (to Vincentius, c. 408) and Letter 185 (to Boniface, c. 417, *On the Correction of the Donatists*), he cited Luke 14:23 as warrant for coercion, arguing pastorally that fear can break the hold of habit and that a father disciplines the son he loves. He consistently opposed the death penalty for Donatists, urging fines, confiscation, and exile instead. His authority nevertheless gave later centuries a ready proof-text: medieval canonists and inquisitors invoked *compelle intrare*, as did persecutors on various sides in the Reformation era. Pierre Bayle's *Philosophical Commentary* (1686) directly refuted the argument after Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes.
6. The verbs differ. In Luke 14:23 the master says *anankason* (from *anankazō*, "compel, constrain"). In 2 Corinthians 5:14 Paul writes *synechei* (from *synechō*, "hold fast, press upon, control"), rendered in the King James Version "the love of Christ constraineth us." The link between the two texts is theological rather than lexical.
7. See Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).
8. Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1.1.
9. Lamorna Ash, *Don't Forget We're Here Forever: A New Generation's Search for Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2025).
10. *Epistle to Diognetus* 5–6 (second century): "What the soul is in the body, that Christians are in the world" (6.1). See Michael W. Holmes, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).
11. Julian, Letter to Arsacius, High-Priest of Galatia (c. 362): "For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galilaeans support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us." *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, trans. Wilmer Cave Wright, vol. 3, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923), Letter 22. Most scholars accept the letter as Julian's, though they have questioned its authenticity (Peter Van Nuffelen, 2002).
12. 1 Peter 3:15.
13. *Christ and Abbot Mena*, from the Monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit, Egypt, second half of the sixth century, painted on wood. Jean Clédat excavated it early in the twentieth century. Musée du Louvre, Paris, Department of Egyptian Antiquities, inv. E 11565.

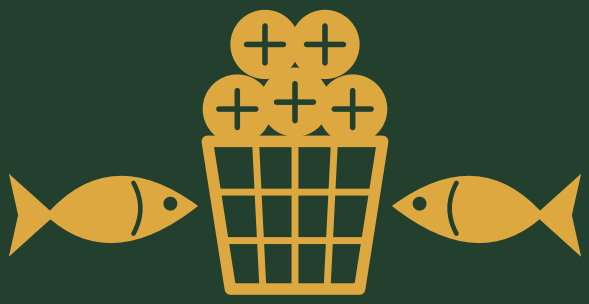
14. Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship* 1.1, trans. Lawrence C. Braceland, ed. Marsha L. Dutton, Cistercian Fathers 5 (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2010).

15. *The Rule of St. Benedict* 53.1, citing Matthew 25:35. See *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981).

16. "Belonging before believing" reverses the sociologist Grace Davie's well-known description of religion in modern Britain as "believing without belonging." Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

17. 1 Corinthians 13:1.

18. The Prayer for Missions, *The Book of Common Prayer* (1928).



PART II

The Small *(Effective)* Church

Deploying the Gifts God Has Given

NEMA Synod · November 6, 2026

"There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?"

JOHN 6:9

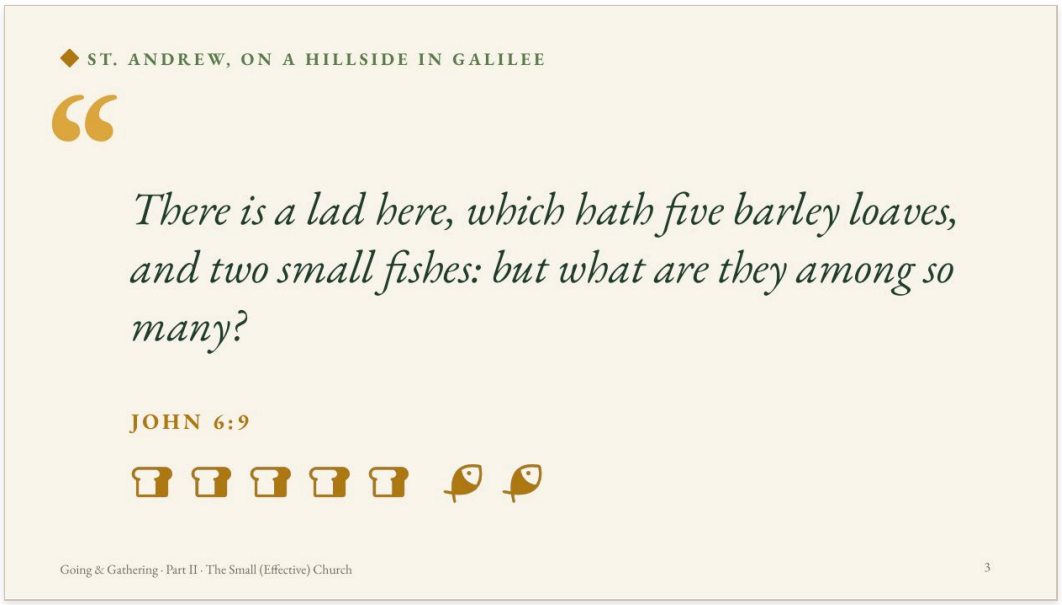
Opening

Invite the room to pray together.

> *Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified; Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before thee for all estates of men in thy holy Church, that every member of the same, in his vocation and ministry, may truly and godly serve thee; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* **Amen.**[1]

Yesterday I named four objections we often hear when the subject turns to mission. The first was this: *"We're too small."* Today I want to give this fuller attention.

So let me begin where yesterday ended — with St. Andrew. I told you that I made him the patron saint of my presentations. Here he is again.



SLIDE 3 *"But what are they among so many?" · John 6:9*

A great multitude has followed our Lord into the hills beyond the Sea of Galilee. About five thousand men, St. John tells us, sat down on the grass. Jesus turns to Philip and asks, *Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?* Philip does the math and reports that two hundred pennyworth would not be enough bread. And then Andrew — the one who is always bringing someone to Jesus — brings a boy.

> *There is a lad here, he says, who has five barley loaves and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? (John 6:9)*

Brothers and sisters, that is the sentence. *What are they among so many?* I have heard it in vestry meetings and on parish visits. And as a planter and now as a rector, I sometimes ask myself the same question. *We are thirty people in a town of thirty thousand. We have one priest, an old building, and a budget we can't stretch. What are we among so many?*

But notice what Jesus *doesn't* do. He doesn't wait for more bread to arrive. He takes the five loaves, gives thanks, and feeds the multitude. We will come back to this hillside before we are done.[2]



SLIDE 4 *Reframe · Diagnose · Discover · Deploy*

Let me share the shape of this second teaching session. First, we will **reframe** the story we tell about smallness. Second, we will **diagnose** honestly why our parishes are small. Third, we will **discover** the gifts God has already placed in our hands. And fourth, we will **deploy** them — turning real limitations into small-church solutions. You have four worksheets in front of you. By the end of our time together, I hope every parish leaves with at least one clear next step.

◆ I

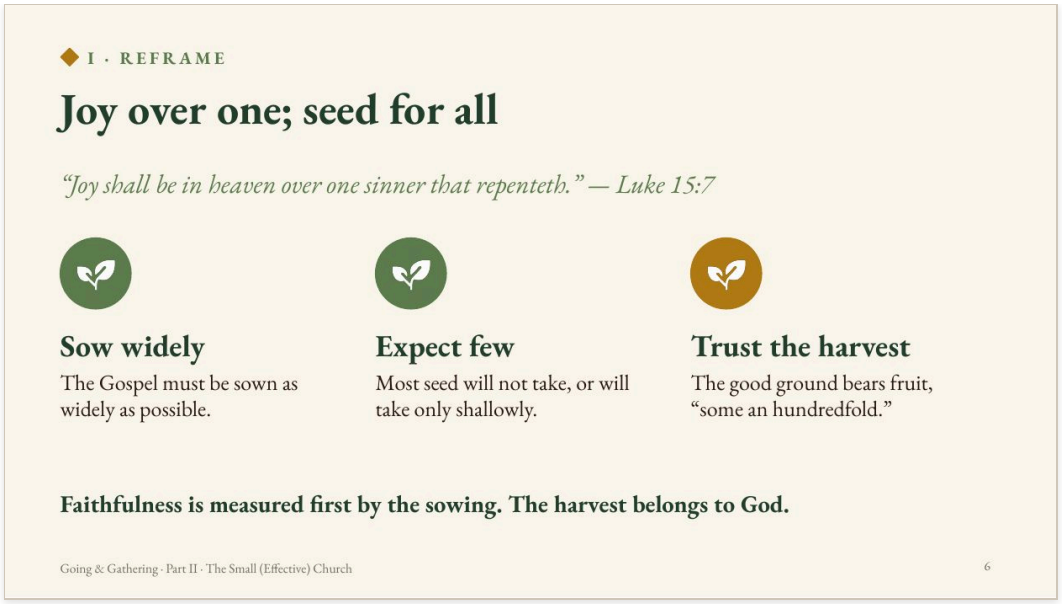
Reframe: The Story We Have Inherited



SLIDE 5 *"The chief and irreplaceable purpose of mission is church growth."*

The modern church growth movement shapes us far more than we know. Its great pioneer, Donald McGavran, put it plainly: *"The chief and irreplaceable purpose of mission is church growth."*[3] Many of us have never read a word of McGavran. But we've breathed the air. It is why the first question asked about any parish is often: *How many parishioners do you have? What's your attendance?* This church-growth air that we breathe is why we assume a "real" church must be large enough to pay a priest, staff its ministries, seat a vestry, and keep up a building—and why anything less oftentimes feels like failure.

Stefan Paas, the Dutch missiologist, offers a gentle and searching correction. He writes from the perspective of small Christian communities in secular Western Europe, but his context is much closer to our American context than one might think. He says the Gospel is far more realistic than any church growth theory. He writes, *"There is, after all, something very dangerous in rejoicing in growth — the result of a statistical calculation — instead of rejoicing in the salvation of a single person."*[4]



SLIDE 6 *The Sower and the One Sinner*

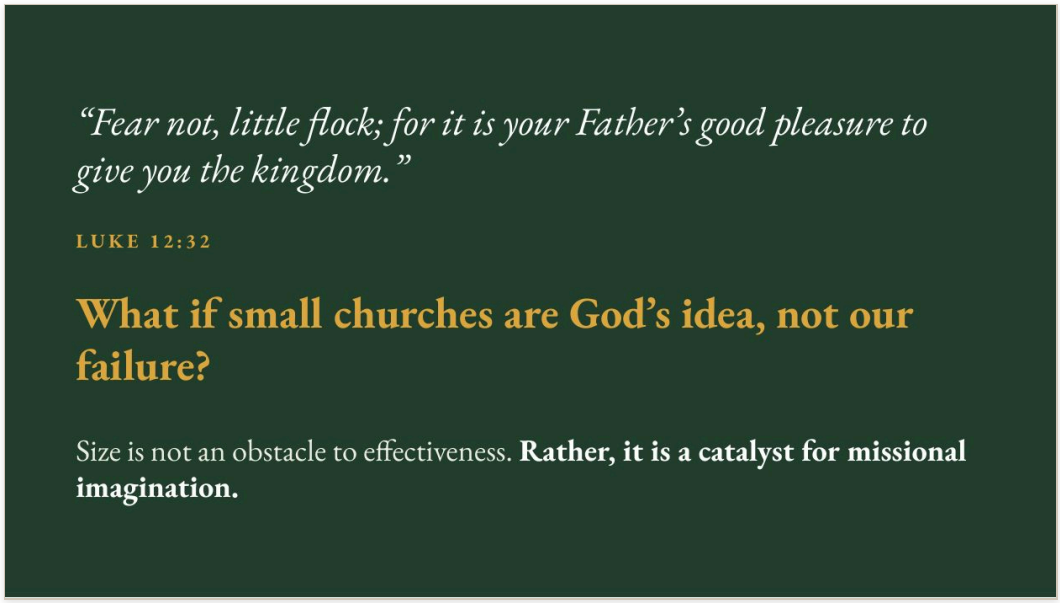
Our Lord said there is *joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth* (Luke 15:7). One. And the parable of the sower teaches us three things at once: one, the seed must be sown as widely as possible; two, most of the Gospel seed we sow will not take, or will take only shallowly; and three, the little that falls on good ground will bear fruit *some an hundredfold* (Matthew 13:8). Faithfulness is measured first by the sowing, and the harvest belongs to God.



SLIDE 7 *"The church that is in thy house."*

And consider the Church of the Apostles. St. Paul, writing to the Roman churches and to Philemon, greets *the church that is in their house* and *the church in thy house* (Romans 16:5; Philemon 2). Writing from Corinth, he sends greetings from *Gaius, my host, and from the whole church* (Romans 16:23)—the whole Christian community of a great port city is able to gather in one man's home. New Testament scholar James Dunn estimates that the church at Corinth numbered only about forty. *"Modern denominations tend to think of any congregation less than 100 as failing,"* he writes, *"but the congregations at the beginning of Christianity were mostly as small."*[5]

The historical record shows that small Christian companies have evangelized nations. In 563 St. Columba crossed from Ireland to a small island off the coast of Scotland with — so tradition tells us — twelve companions. Seventy years later, from Iona, St. Aidan and a handful of monks went south to Lindisfarne and won Northumbria for Christ.[6] Thirteen men on a rock in the sea. I walked some of those Northumbrian streets in my cassock. Every church I passed was there, in the end, because a small community refused to believe it was too small.



SLIDE 8 *"Fear not, little flock." Luke 12:32*

Jesus said, *Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom* (Luke 12:32). Our Lord never despised small beginnings. Zechariah asks, *"Who has despised the day of small things?'* (Zechariah 4:10). So let me ask you: **What if small churches are God's idea and not our failure?** Keep in mind that 75% of all ACNA congregations have an average Sunday attendance of fewer than 100 people. And 50% of all congregations average fewer than 50 people.

Nothing in nature grows bigger forever. A healthy oak grows until it reaches maturity, and then it grows in other ways: deeper roots, wider shade, a thousand acorns. Karl Vater, a pastor who spent nearly his entire ministry in small congregations, writes that *"any definition of church growth that doesn't allow for churches*

that make disciples and contribute to the body of Christ without significant numerical growth is too narrow [a definition]."[7]

As I said yesterday, we gladly rejoice in numerical growth when God gives it. But the hard, holy work before most of our parishes is to be healthy and effective *now*, at the size they are. Here is the reframe I want you to carry out of this room today: **Size is not an obstacle to effectiveness. Rather, it is a catalyst for mission and evangelism.**

◆ II

Diagnose: Why Are We Small?



SLIDE 9 *Is Something Wrong with Small Churches?*

Now, some parishes are small for good reasons, and some are small for bad ones.

When people describe what is wrong with small churches, they usually list things like this: *inward-focused, threatened by change, not reaching their community, poorly managed, under-resourced, settling for less.* Every one of these is real. Yet none of them is a uniquely small-church problem. They are *sick*-church problems — and a congregation of a thousand isn't immune to any of them. Sickness is not a matter of size. So the question is NOT *ARE we small?* The question IS *WHY are we small?*



SLIDE 10 *Stuck or Strategic?*

Are we stuck or strategic? Some parishes are **stuck**. They are *small* ***by mistake*** — doing important and good things but doing them poorly. Perhaps they are *small* ***by exclusion*** — having quietly built barriers that keep others out. Or they are ***frozen in time*** — unwilling to change or adapt, tightly grasping a building and a memory rather than a mission with a kingdom view of the world around them.

Conversely, other parishes are **strategic**. For instance, they might be *small* ***with a purpose*** — deliberately reaching people who long to be known, pastored, and formed. Perhaps a parish is ***small for a time*** — they might be a new church plant in its first years, or a parish going through a season of retooling and rebuilding. Or they are ***small for infiltration***: our Lord said the kingdom is *like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal* (Matthew 13:33). A little leaven can go where a great loaf cannot. And still some parishes are ***small by nature and gifting*** — they are good at some things and not all things, as every member of a body is.[8]

EXERCISE · WORKSHEET 1 · 2 MINUTES, ON YOUR OWN

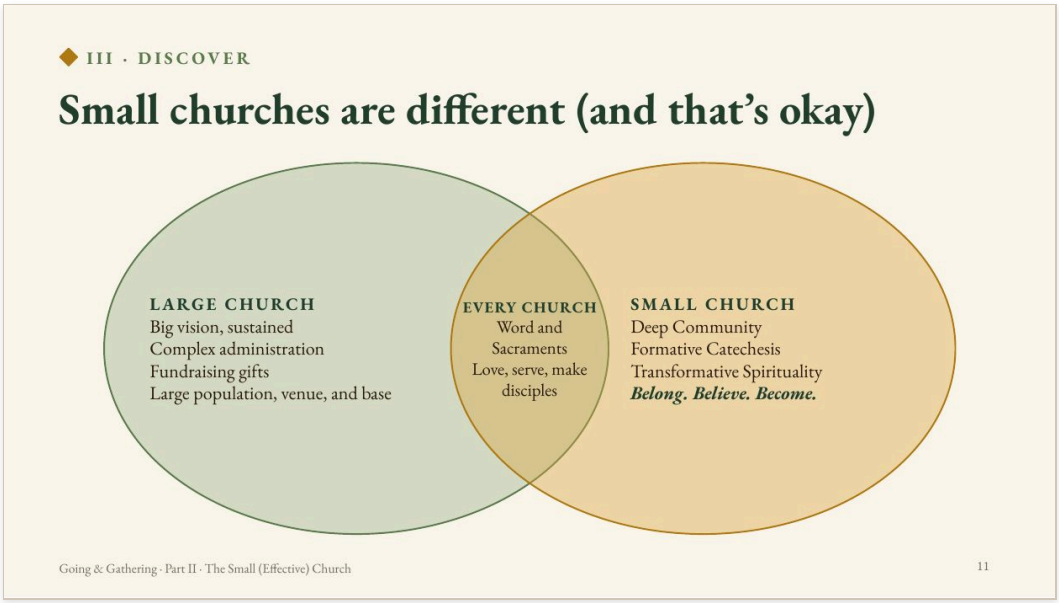
Stuck or Strategic?

"Turn to Worksheet 1. Be honest with yourself before God. Mark each line where your parish truly stands today. Then circle the one that most describes you. Most of us will find we are a little of both." *Do not share aloud. Move on when most pencils are down.*

We all need to hear this: a stuck parish is not a hopeless parish. Every one of the strategic lines on that page describes a parish you can become. And the way out of stuck almost never begins with a new program. It begins with seeing the gifts we already possess.

◆ III

Discover: The Gifts of a Small Parish



SLIDE 11 *Small Churches Are Different (and That's Okay)*

People behave differently in small groups than in large ones. This holds true for different-sized churches. The greater the size difference, the greater the difference in how the ministry and mission of a parish is accomplished. Yet we often borrow large-church methods for small-church parishes and wonder why they don't work.

Every church has essentials, regardless of size: preaching the pure Word of God, administering the Sacraments, loving and worshiping God, and missional going and making disciples. These are essential to every church regardless of their size. Then there are essentials specific to large churches. For example, the ability to cast and sustain a big vision for a long time; highly complex administrative and organizational skills; a larger surrounding population; a culture and government that isn't hostile to Christianity; little resistance from neighbors; a large base of wealthy congregants; and a large venue or base of operation.

Vater observes that very few churches will ever have this confluence of skills and circumstances.[9] It is wonderful when they do. However, it is not the norm, and it is not the measure.

Large churches tend to prioritize vision, process, and programs. A small parish is best served by prioritizing the three fundamentals I described yesterday: **Deep Community, Formative Catechesis, and Transformative Spirituality.** *Belong. Believe. Become.* Yesterday's map, but lived at the scale of your parish.



SLIDE 12 *Six Gifts of the Small Parish*

So let me name six gifts a small parish has that many large ones envy.

The first, Known. In a small parish, no one is anonymous. The newcomer is noticed on her first Sunday and missed on her second. In an age of lonely crowds, being known by name is no small gift. When Jim Davis and Michael Graham asked dechurched evangelicals what would bring them back, about half said they were willing to return—and the most common reason was simply to make new friends.[10] A church where people are known is the beginning of belonging.

The second, Needed. *The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee* (1 Corinthians 12:21). In a large church, you can sit in the back for ten years. In a small parish, everyone is needed — at the altar guild, at the coffee hour, in the Office, at the door. Every-member ministry is not a slogan for us. It is a necessity, and necessity is a good teacher.

The third, Household. The Church was born in homes. A small parish can live like a household: Family Prayer and Evening Prayer in living rooms, shared meals, catechesis in a circle of chairs rather than a lecture hall. Formation happens by proximity.

The fourth, Nimble. A small parish can decide on Sunday and begin on Monday. No committees of committees. It can try something, learn, adapt, and try again before a large church has finished its planning.

The fifth, Rooted. A small parish can be leaven in its Parish Mile: its people known in the shops, schools, and pubs; its priest seen on the street; its people visible within the normal patterns of community life.

The sixth, Real. Many who have left their churches in recent years are tired of spectacle and hungry for reverence, holiness, and something tried, tested, and stable. They are not looking for a bigger show. A small Prayer Book parish, reverent and friendly, is exactly what many of them are looking for. None of these gifts

depend on money. All of them depend on being a small, nimble, and hospitable parish.



SLIDE 13 *Workshop 1 · Five Loaves and Two Small Fishes*

EXERCISE · WORKSHEET 2 · 8 MINUTES (5 AT YOUR TABLE, 3 TO SHARE)

Five Loaves and Two Small Fishes

"I want you to take inventory of the gifts already in your hands by working through the 5 boxes on the worksheet. (1) People: who do you have, and what are they good at? (2) Places: homes, your building and grounds, the spots in your Parish Mile where your people already are. (3) Practices: what does your parish already do well — Bible and catechetical teaching, high liturgical feasts, hospitality, music? (4) Relationships: schools, workplaces, civic groups, neighbors. (5) Character: what is your parish's personality? Then circle the two that are your strongest gifts." *At 5 minutes, ask three parishes to share one gift each.*

◆ IV

Deploy: From Limitations to Solutions



SLIDE 14 *"Make the men sit down."*

Let's return to the hillside. Our Lord did three things with those five loaves. First, He **ordered** the crowd: *Make the men sit down.* Then, He **gave thanks** for what was there — not for what was missing. Finally, He **distributed** it through his disciples. The miracle was his, but the passing of the baskets was theirs. That is how a small parish becomes effective. Not by wishing for more, but by ordering what it has, giving thanks for it, and putting it into the hands of its people.



SLIDE 15 *Real and Perceived Limitations*

We need to be honest about our limitations because they exist. I want to share six limitations I often hear, and answer each with a small-church solution.

Lack of clergy and staff. Then raise up lay leaders. Laymen and laywomen can lead the Daily Office, host home fellowships, and visit the sick. The priest's work is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:12).

Limited finances. As I said yesterday, friendship and hospitality cost almost nothing. Build your front porch out of the shared life and worship you are already enjoying — build upon these first, then develop new and creative means of belonging.

Inadequate space or location. Remember Gaius's house! Use homes, parks, a pub's back room, a restaurant, a cigar shop, a public hall, the college campus nearby.

Time constraints. Do fewer things, but do them well. Fold mission into the rhythms you already keep — a public Rogation procession, a Twelfth Night party, an annual Christmas concert, or hold an annual neighborhood barbecue.

Low or no visibility. Be seen in your Parish Mile. Bless the animals in the public park. Wear the cassock to the coffee shop. Move the women's bible study to a local restaurant. Get a booth at the farmers market.

Difficulty shepherding everyone. Share the care. Deploy your Wardens, create a lay care team as an extension of pastoral care, build pastorally into home fellowship leaders, cast a vision for intergenerational discipleship — each member shepherding one or two. And remember: knowing everyone is your gift. Don't trade it for a system.

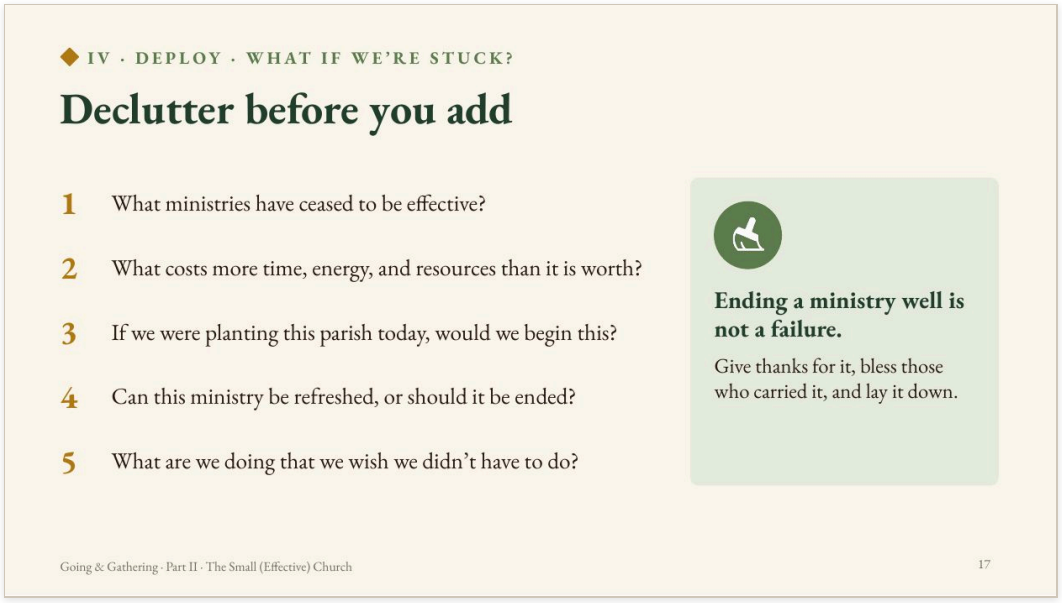


SLIDE 16 *Workshop 2 · Limitations into Solutions*

EXERCISE · WORKSHEET 3 · 10 MINUTES (7 AT YOUR TABLE, 3 TO SHARE)

Limitations into Solutions

"Choose the two limitations most real for your parish — or name your own. For each, write one small-church solution. Here is the rule: your solution must use at least one gift from Worksheet 2. Build your solution from what is already in your hands, not from what you wish you had: more money, more clergy, or more people."

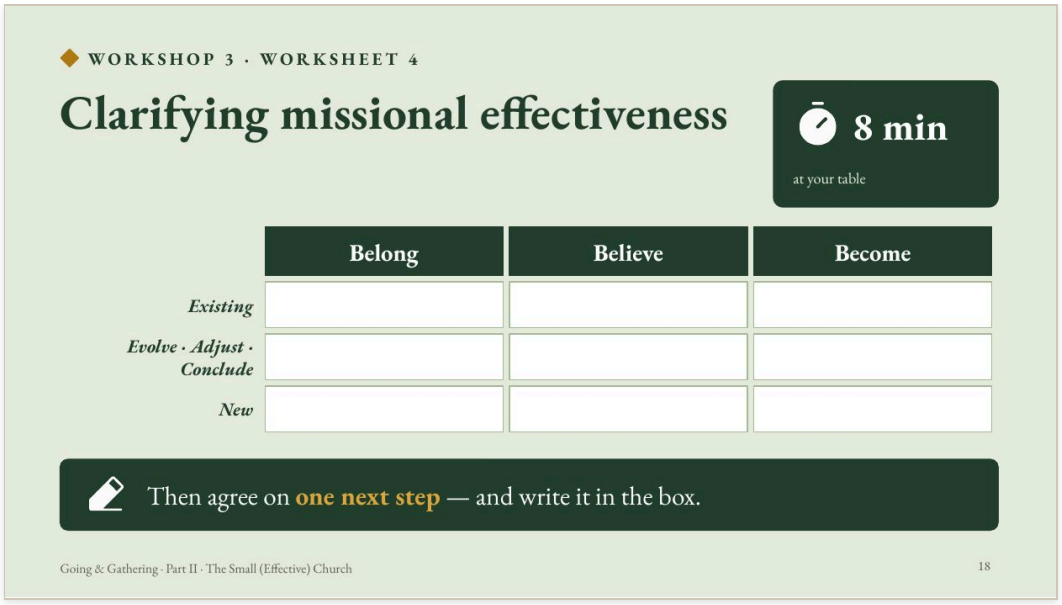


SLIDE 17 *What If We're Stuck? Declutter Before You Add*

Before you add anything new, a word of caution. Healthy parishes declutter before they launch. Most small parishes aren't idle; they are overloaded, carrying ministries that once bore fruit and now only weigh them down. So ask five questions:

> *What ministries have ceased to be effective? What costs more time, energy, and resources than it is worth? If we were planting this parish today, would we begin this? Can we refresh this ministry, or should we end it? What are we doing that we wish we didn't have to do?*

Ending a ministry well is not a failure. Give thanks for what it was, bless the people who carried it, and lay it down. That, too, is gathering up the fragments.



SLIDE 18 *Workshop 3 · Clarifying Missional Effectiveness*

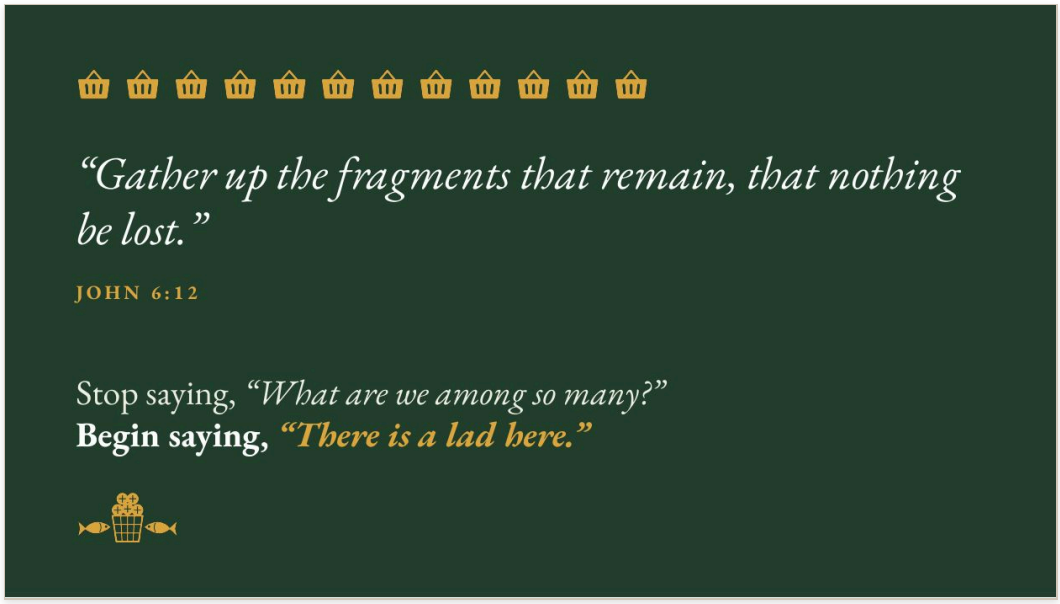
EXERCISE · WORKSHEET 4 · 8 MINUTES

Clarifying Missional Effectiveness

"Now put it all on one page. Across the top are our three fundamentals: Belong, Believe, Become. Down the side: what already exists; what needs to evolve, adjust, or conclude; and what is new. Fill in what you can. You won't finish, and that's okay. Then, at the bottom, agree on one next step your parish will take — one — and write it in the box."

When you go back to your parish, take that page to your rector and vestry, and to the Going & Gathering Team I asked you to form yesterday. The workbook available via the QR code from yesterday will walk you from this first step to a full ninety-day plan.

Closing: Gather Up the Fragments



SLIDE 19 *"Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." John 6:12*

Let's return to the hillside one last time. When the multitude had eaten as much as they would, our Lord did not let the leftovers lie in the grass. He said, "*Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost."* And the disciples filled twelve baskets.

Nothing a small parish offers to Christ is wasted. Not the faithful thirty congregants. Not the Daily Office prayed by two or three souls. Not the parish meal, the friendships, the feast days, the hospital visits. In his hands, five loaves are enough. They have always been enough.

So I ask you to change one sentence when you go home. Stop saying, *"What are we among so many?"* Begin saying what Andrew said first: *"There is a lad here."* Because there is a parish here; each of your parishes precisely where the Lord has planted you. There is a priest, a deacon, a planter. There is a committed vestry, faithful families and laity, and gifts which the Lord has placed in your hands. Bring them to Jesus, and see what he will do.

Invite the Synod to stand and pray together.

> *Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto thee; and dost promise that when two or three are gathered together in thy Name thou wilt grant their requests: Fulfil now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants, as may be most expedient for them; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting.* **Amen.**[11]

Notes

1. The Collect for Good Friday ("Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified..."), *The Book of Common Prayer* (1928).
2. John 6:5–13. St. Andrew brings his brother Simon to Jesus in John 1:40–42, and the Greeks who would see Jesus in John 12:20–22.
3. Donald McGavran, quoted in Stefan Paas, *Pilgrims and Priests: Christian Mission in a Post-Christian Society* (London: SCM Press, 2019), 68.
4. Paas, *Pilgrims and Priests*, 72. Paas cites Luke 15:7–10 and observes that "the dream of a constantly growing church is not dominant in the New Testament," pointing to Luke 18:8 (73).
5. James D. G. Dunn, in Steven Croft, ed., *Mission-Shaped Questions: Defining Issues for Today's Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2008), 62. See also 1 Corinthians 14:23, where "the whole church" comes "together into one place."
6. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* 3.3–5, on Aidan's mission from Iona to Lindisfarne (635); Adomnán, *Life of St. Columba*. The tradition of Columba's twelve companions recalls the Twelve.
7. Karl Vater, *Small Church Essentials: Field-Tested Principles for Leading a Healthy Congregation of Under 250* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018), 92.
8. 1 Corinthians 12:12–27.
9. Vater, *Small Church Essentials*, 87.
10. Jim Davis and Michael Graham, with Ryan P. Burge, *The Great De-Churching: Who's Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2023). Among dechurched evangelicals, 51 percent said they were somewhat or very willing to return; the most common reason given (28 percent) was making new friends.
11. A Prayer of St. Chrysostom, Morning and Evening Prayer, *The Book of Common Prayer* (1928).



Christ and Abbot Menas · Musée du Louvre, Paris

PART III

The Parish Workbook

Going & Gathering

Developing a Missional Strategy for Your Parish

Seven sessions for the rector, vestry, and Going & Gathering Team

"Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city ... that my house may be filled."

LUKE 14:21, 23

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook guides a rector, vestry, and mission team through seven meetings. Each session takes 60 to 75 minutes and ends with one clear decision. By the last session, those decisions add up to your parish's 90-day missional plan. Work through it together, in order, and write in it freely.

EVERY SESSION FOLLOWS ONE RHYTHM

Pray
Open with a prayer from the Prayer Book.

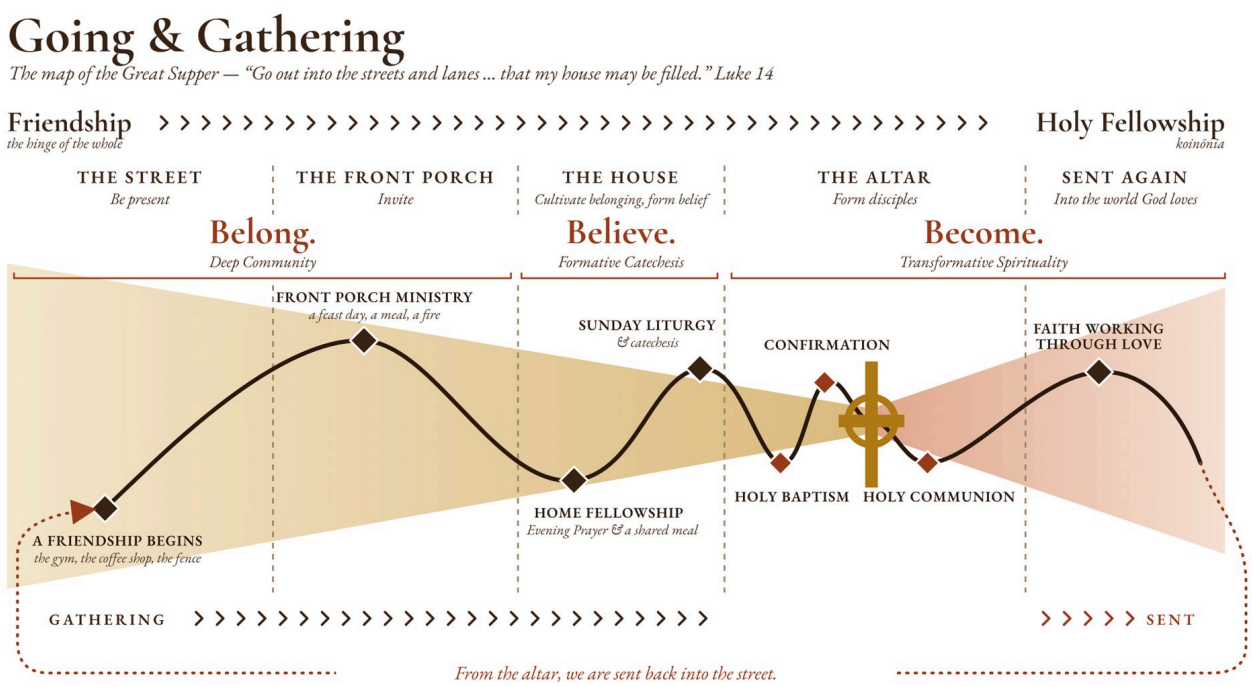
Read
One short page, read aloud together.

Discuss
Honest conversation around a few questions.

Do
Work the worksheet as a team.

Decide
Record one decision for the 90-day plan.

YOUR ROADMAP



- [ ] **1** Why We Go
- [ ] **2** Our Parish Mile
- [ ] **3** The Street and Friendship
- [ ] **4** The Front Porch
- [ ] **5** The House and the Altar
- [ ] **6** An Honest Diagnosis
- [ ] **7** Build the 90-Day Plan
- [ ] *Then* 30-Day Check-In · 90-Day Review

SESSION ONE

I Why We Go

The Sending God · The Heart Precedes the Hands

> *"Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."*
>
> JOHN 20:21

◆ PRAY

The convener begins. All stand or kneel.

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.**

The Prayer for Missions, The Book of Common Prayer (1928)

BY THE END OF THIS SESSION

Your team will share a common conviction about why the parish goes, and will commit to a simple parish practice of prayer for the people and places around you.

FOR THE CONVENER

Time
60–75 minutes

Bring
Prayer Books; this workbook for each member; the synod handout, if you have it.

Roles
A convener (usually the rector) and a scribe, who records the team's decision.

The hour

Pray	5 min
Read aloud	5 min
Discuss	20 min
Do	25 min
Decide	10 min
Close in prayer	5 min

A word to the convener
Resist the urge to plan tonight. This session is about conviction, not strategy. The plan will come.

◆ READ ALOUD

A Locked Door and an Open Road

A few years ago, a company of clergy walked the streets of England and Scotland in their cassocks. Again and again they passed the old parish churches, once beacons of the faith, standing locked. Some had been abandoned; others had become community centers or fair-trade markets. Every one of them had been built by Christians who believed they had been sent to that place with the Gospel, for the souls who lived within the sound of its bells.

How does a church become a locked door? It does not happen in a day. No vestry ever votes to stop being sent. It happens slowly, almost imperceptibly, when a congregation forgets why it was planted and begins to live for itself. And when decline comes, frightened churches turn inward to guard what remains. But fear is a poor fuel. It burns hot, and it burns out.



The Church does not become missional because it is declining. The Church is missional because God is missional.

On the evening of the first Easter Day, the disciples sat behind closed doors, afraid. The first Christian congregation was a locked room full of frightened people. And Jesus came and stood in the midst and said, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." The Father sends the Son; the Father and the Son send the Holy Ghost; and the risen Son sends us. We did not design this mission. We have been swept up into it.

That is why the heart must precede the hands. Programs driven by anxiety wither; mission must flow from a heart formed by the love of God. For us, that heart is formed where it has always been formed: on our knees, with the Prayer Book open, and at the altar. There we offer "our selves, our souls and bodies," and ask grace to "do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in." The road is already laid. We do not rise from the Lord's Table to invent a mission. We rise to walk into one.

◆ DISCUSS · 20 MINUTES

Talk It Through

Let everyone speak before anyone speaks twice. The scribe notes what the team keeps returning to.

1 Have you seen a parish turn inward out of fear? What was it protecting, and what did it lose?

2 "The Church is missional because God is missional." If we truly believed this, what would change in our parish first?

3 Where in our worship is a heart for our neighbors already being formed? Where is it not?

4 Who first brought you near to the faith? How did they come toward you?

5 What anxieties are we bringing into this work? Name them honestly, and offer them to God.

◆ DO · PART ONE

Choose a Parish Practice of Prayer

Mark each practice the parish will take up. Begin with what you can sustain.

- ☐ Name the people and places around the parish in the intercessions at every public service.
- ☐ Ask every parishioner to pray daily, by name, for three people they already know.
- ☐ Pray the Prayer for Missions at the close of every vestry and team meeting.
- ☐ Pray for hearts that love our neighbors whether or not they ever join the parish.

◆ DO · PART TWO

Our Prayer List

First names or initials are enough. Mission begins with names, not prospects.

TEAM MEMBER	NAME ONE	NAME TWO	NAME THREE

Places and communities we will name in our intercessions

What God has already given: relationships, skills, and vocations among us

◆ DECIDE · SESSION ONE

Carries forward to the 90-Day Plan: "People and places we will pray for"

Beginning on _____, our parish will pray for the people and places around us in _____, and each member of this team will pray daily, by name, for the three people written above.

Recorded by (scribe)

Date

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Pray for the names on the list in silence, then say together the Lord's Prayer and the Grace.

BEFORE SESSION TWO

Walk or drive the mile around the church once, slowly. Notice who is there, and what you have never seen before.

SESSION TWO

2 Our Parish Mile

Where Has God Placed Us?

> *"Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city."*
>
> LUKE 14:21

◆ PRAY

O God, the Creator and Preserver of all mankind, we humbly beseech thee for all sorts and conditions of men; that thou wouldest be pleased to make thy ways known unto them, thy saving health unto all nations. More especially we pray for thy holy Church universal; that it may be so guided and governed by thy good Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life. Finally, we commend to thy fatherly goodness all those who are any ways afflicted, or distressed, in mind, body, or estate; that it may please thee to comfort and relieve them, according to their several necessities; giving them patience under their sufferings, and a happy issue out of all their afflictions. And this we beg for Jesus Christ's sake. **Amen.**

A Prayer for All Conditions of Men, The Book of Common Prayer (1928)

BY THE END OF THIS SESSION

Your team will have drawn and named your Parish Mile: the people and places for which your parish will take particular responsibility before God.

FOR THE CONVENER

Time
60–75 minutes

Bring
A printed street map of the area around the church, colored pens, and the prayer list from Session 1.

Roles
Convener, scribe, and a "mapper" who marks the team's map as you talk.

The hour

Pray	5 min
Report: the walk	10 min
Read aloud	5 min
Discuss	15 min
Do: map it	25 min
Decide & close	10 min

A word to the convener
Begin by hearing what each member saw on the walk. Listen before you plan.

◆ READ ALOUD

Which Street?

Not a line, but a circle: from the altar, we are sent back into the street. But which street? The servant in the parable was not sent into the whole world at once. He was sent into the streets and lanes of the city, the ones nearest his master's house. So before a parish walks this map, it must find its starting place.

Do not begin with a diocesan campaign. Begin with the people and places God has already put within reach of your parish and, by extension, your parishioners' homes. What lies within a mile of your church: what streets and apartment blocks, schools and shops, parks and pubs? Where do your people work, shop, eat, and volunteer? Who lives within sight of your bell tower and has never once crossed your threshold?



Mission rarely begins by creating something new. It usually begins by noticing what God has already given.

Call this your **Parish Mile**. It need not be a literal mile. In a city it may be four streets; in the country, half a county; for some parishes, the truest mission field will be relational rather than geographical. The point is to move from the abstraction called "the community" to actual names, actual places, and actual people for whom your parish will take particular responsibility before God.

And look at what God has already placed among you: the parishioner who teaches at the elementary school, the one who serves on the town council, the one who knows every shop owner on Main Street. Before you plan anything, listen. Learn who lives here, where people already gather, and what hopes and pressures your neighbors carry.

◆ DISCUSS · 15 MINUTES

Listen Before You Plan

1 What did you see on your walk that surprised you?

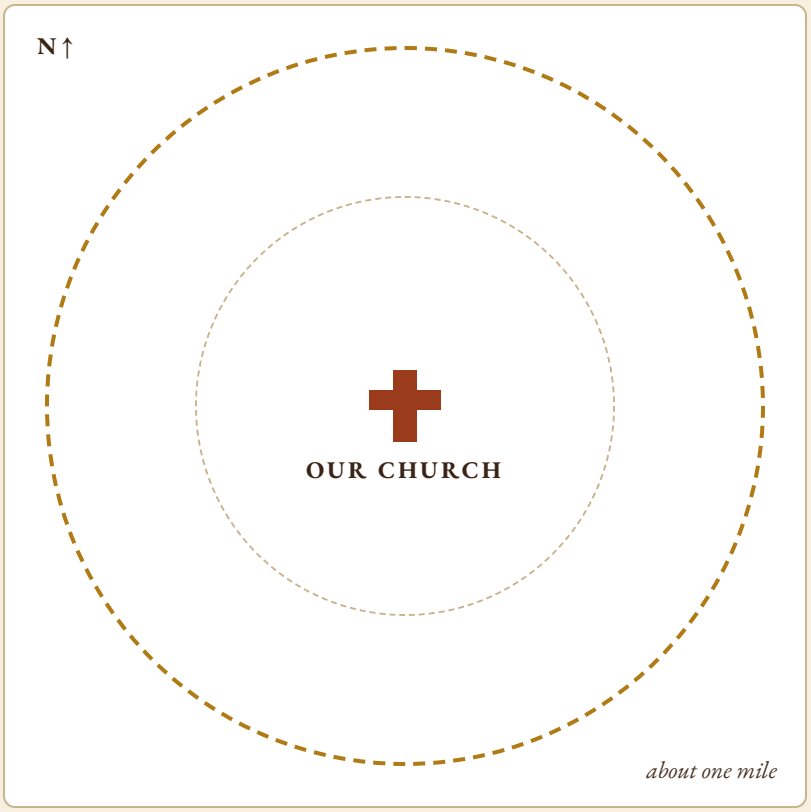
2 Where are people already gathering, and who is there?

3 What hopes, needs, or pressures do we hear from our neighbors?

4 Where are our parishioners already trusted, known, or involved?

◆ DO · PART ONE

Draw Your Parish Mile



MARK ON THE MAP

- ☐ Neighborhoods and apartment blocks
- ☐ Schools, shops, parks, and pubs
- ☐ Community centers and gathering places
- ☐ Where parishioners live, work, and volunteer
- ☐ Places where we have never been seen

It need not be a literal mile. Draw the circle, geographic or relational, that fits your place.

◆ DO · PART TWO

Name What Is Within Reach

Three places within our Parish Mile where we have never been seen

1

2

3

Local institutions, groups, and gathering places we should know better

People, relationships, and gifts already present in our congregation

Who lives within sight of our bell tower and has never once crossed our threshold?

◆ DECIDE · SESSION TWO

Carries forward to the 90-Day Plan: "Our Parish Mile"

Our Parish Mile is:

☐ Geographic ☐ Relational ☐ Both

Recorded by (scribe)

Date

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Pray over the map: for each place marked, and for those who live and work there. Then the Lord's Prayer.

BEFORE SESSION THREE

Spend one unhurried hour somewhere in the Parish Mile: a café, a park, a school event. Be present. Notice who comes near.

SESSION THREE

3 The Street and Friendship

Be Present · The Hinge of the Whole

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

◆ PRAY

Almighty God, who didst give such grace unto thy holy Apostle Saint Andrew, that he readily obeyed the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him without delay; Grant unto us all, that we, being called by thy holy Word, may forthwith give up ourselves obediently to fulfil thy holy commandments; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect for Saint Andrew's Day, The Book of Common Prayer (1928)

BY THE END OF THIS SESSION

Your team will choose one practice of going: a simple, sustainable way for your people to become present in the Parish Mile and to cultivate genuine friendship there.

FOR THE CONVENER

Time
60–75 minutes

Bring
Your Parish Mile map from Session 2 and the team's prayer list.

Roles
Convener and scribe.

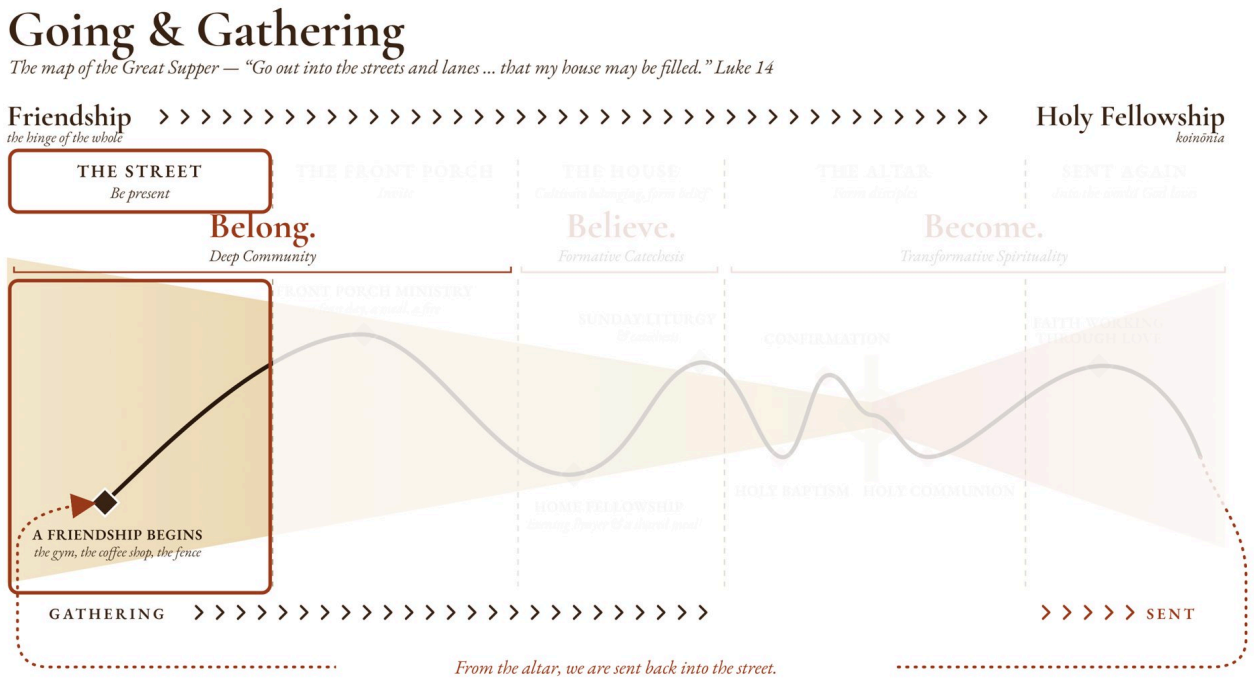
The hour

Pray	5 min
Report: the hour	10 min
Read aloud	5 min
Discuss	15 min
Do	25 min
Decide & close	10 min

A word to the convener
Watch for friendship sliding into technique. People can always tell when they are a project.

◆ READ ALOUD

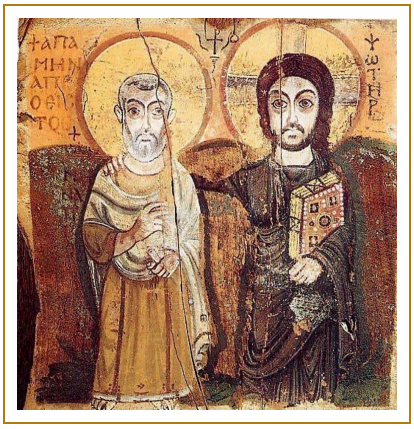
Seen, and Not in a Hurry



The street is ordinary life: the office, the gym, the coffee shop, the school pick-up line, the neighbor over the fence. Our first task there is not to turn every encounter into a pitch, but to be genuinely and unhurriedly present. The ancient *Epistle to Diognetus* says that what the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world: not a separate enclave, but life given quietly from within.

Outside a pub in Durham, a young man once stopped me in my cassock. Within a minute he had confessed his unbelief, and in the same breath the memory of a faith he once held welled up. What brought it to the surface was simple: he could see me, and I was in no hurry. **People will often come to us when they can see us, and when we are not in a hurry.**

Presence ripens into friendship, and friendship is the hinge of the whole. The Church's first evangelism was a brother fetching his brother. But friendship is never a technique; we must be willing to love our neighbors whether or not they ever darken our door. Real friendship makes room for a word about faith when it is asked for, an invitation to a meal or to Evening Prayer, an honest "I don't know," and patient presence in sorrow.



◆ DISCUSS · 15 MINUTES

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

ST. AELRED OF RIEVAULX, SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP 1.1

Christ stands beside Abbot Menas, his arm on his shoulder. Not enthroned above him. Beside him.

1 Report on your unhurried hour. Who came near? What did you notice?

2 What keeps our people from being visible and unhurried in the places they already go?

3 How can we tell the difference between friendship and treating someone as a project?

4 When has a friend's simple invitation changed something for you?

◆ DO · PART ONE

Practices of Presence

Mark the practices you will commend to the whole parish.

- ☐ Learn names; ask questions and wait for the answers.
- ☐ Show up: the hospital visit, the note after the funeral.
- ☐ Give an answer for our hope, with meekness and fear.
- ☐ Be available in grief, transition, or crisis.
- ☐ Become a regular somewhere in the Parish Mile.
- ☐ Be willing to say, "I don't know."

◆ DO · PART TWO

My Practice This Week

Each member fills this in alone, then shares one line with the team.

THIS WEEK	MY COMMITMENT
A person I will pray for by name	
A person I will listen to more attentively	
A place where I will slow down and be present	
A practical act of care I can offer	

One friendship I want to tend with greater attention

◆ DECIDE · SESSION THREE

Carries forward to the 90-Day Plan: "One practice of going"

Our one practice of going:

How we will commend it to the whole parish:

Recorded by (scribe)

Date

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Each member prays aloud, briefly, for the one friendship they named. Then the Lord's Prayer.

BEFORE SESSION FOUR

List every gathering the parish already holds across a year: feasts, suppers, studies, fellowships, sales.

SESSION FOUR

4 The Front Porch

Invite · Fishing with Nets, Not Hooks

> *"A certain man made a great supper, and bade many."*
>
> LUKE 14:16

PRAY

O Lord, who never failest to help and govern them whom thou dost bring up in thy steadfast fear and love; Keep us, we beseech thee, under the protection of thy good providence, and make us to have a perpetual fear and love of thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect for the Second Sunday after Trinity, whose Gospel is the parable of the Great Supper. The Book of Common Prayer (1928)

BY THE END OF THIS SESSION

Your team will choose one practice of gathering, a front porch ministry, and plan its welcome before planning the event itself.

FOR THE CONVENER

Time
60–75 minutes

Bring
The list of the parish's yearly gatherings, the parish calendar, and the Parish Mile map.

Roles
Convener and scribe. Invite anyone who hosts parish events.

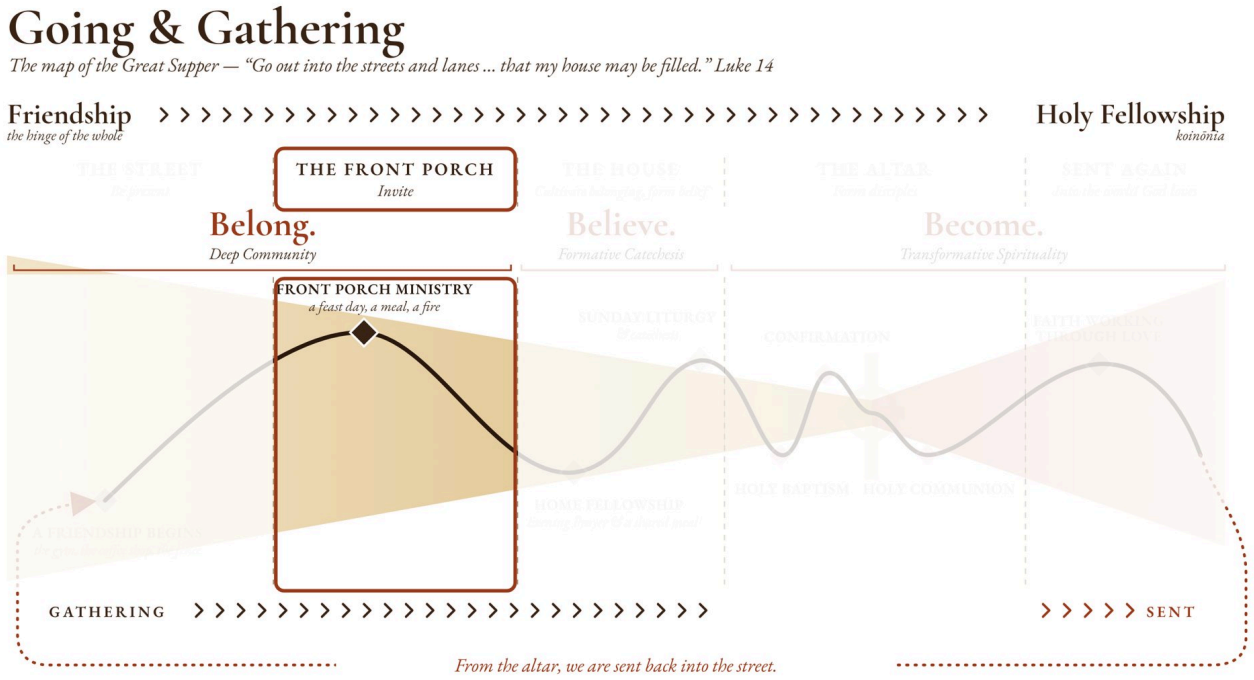
The hour

Pray	5 min
Read aloud	5 min
Discuss	15 min
Do: choose three	15 min
Do: plan the welcome	20 min
Decide & close	10 min

A word to the convener
Resist inventing new programs. Ask which of our existing gatherings could open its doors.

◆ READ ALOUD

The Doors Open Wide



Yet friendship cannot carry the whole weight alone. Sooner or later a friend must be invited somewhere: to a meal, a feast, a fire. That is the front porch, an invitation into a little more of our common parish life. Front porch ministries let people draw near before they believe, before they embrace our Reformed Catholic way, before they step across the threshold into the full life of the parish.

Begin with the treasures you already possess: a Rogation procession, a blessing of animals, an Epiphany house blessing, an Advent concert; and alongside these the ordinary life of the parish, from the garage sale to the cigar fellowship by the fire. Bishop Sutton calls this fishing with nets rather than hooks. Every front porch ministry is a square in the net, and the net is cast in the open. We never trick anyone into attending, nor hide our intentions.

But an event is not evangelism; it is an opening for relationships to begin. So plan the welcome before you plan the event. Who will greet the newcomer? Who will sit with them? Who will call them the next week? **A full hall that leads nowhere is a missed supper.**

◆ DISCUSS · 15 MINUTES

Which Doors Could Open?

1 Look at your list of the parish's gatherings. Which of them could become an open invitation with little added cost?

2 What do our people already love doing together?

3 Think of a time a newcomer came to a parish event. What happened next, and what should have?

4 How might the Church's year (Rogation, Epiphany, Advent, our patronal feast) open doors to our neighbors?

◆ DO · PART ONE

Name No More Than Three Possibilities

POSSIBLE INVITATION	WHO MIGHT IT REACH?	WHO COULD HOST?

Then circle the one the team will begin with.

◆ DO · PART TWO

Plan the Welcome First

PLAN THE INVITATION	OUR DECISION
Our chosen front porch invitation	
What will make it genuinely welcoming to a newcomer?	
Who will greet, sit with, and introduce guests?	
Who will follow up personally the next week?	
What next step will continue the relationship?	

◆ DECIDE · SESSION FOUR

Carries forward to the 90-Day Plan: "One practice of gathering"

Our one practice of gathering:

To be held on

Welcome led by

Recorded by (scribe)

Date

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Pray for the guests who have not yet been invited, and for those who will greet them. Then the Lord's Prayer.

BEFORE SESSION FIVE

Attend Sunday worship as if you were a visitor. Note what would confuse, welcome, or move a stranger.

SESSION FIVE

5 The House and the Altar

Cultivate Belonging, Form Belief · Form Disciples

"Come; for all things are now ready."

LUKE 14:17

PRAY

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect for Purity, from the Order for the Holy Communion. The Book of Common Prayer (1928)

BY THE END OF THIS SESSION

Your team will draw a clear path from a first welcome to belonging, catechesis, and the sacraments, and name who will tend hospitality and follow-up.

FOR THE CONVENER

Time
60–75 minutes

Bring
Notes from Sunday seen through a visitor's eyes, and a list of current groups, classes, and catechesis offerings.

Roles
Convener and scribe. The rector should be present for this session.

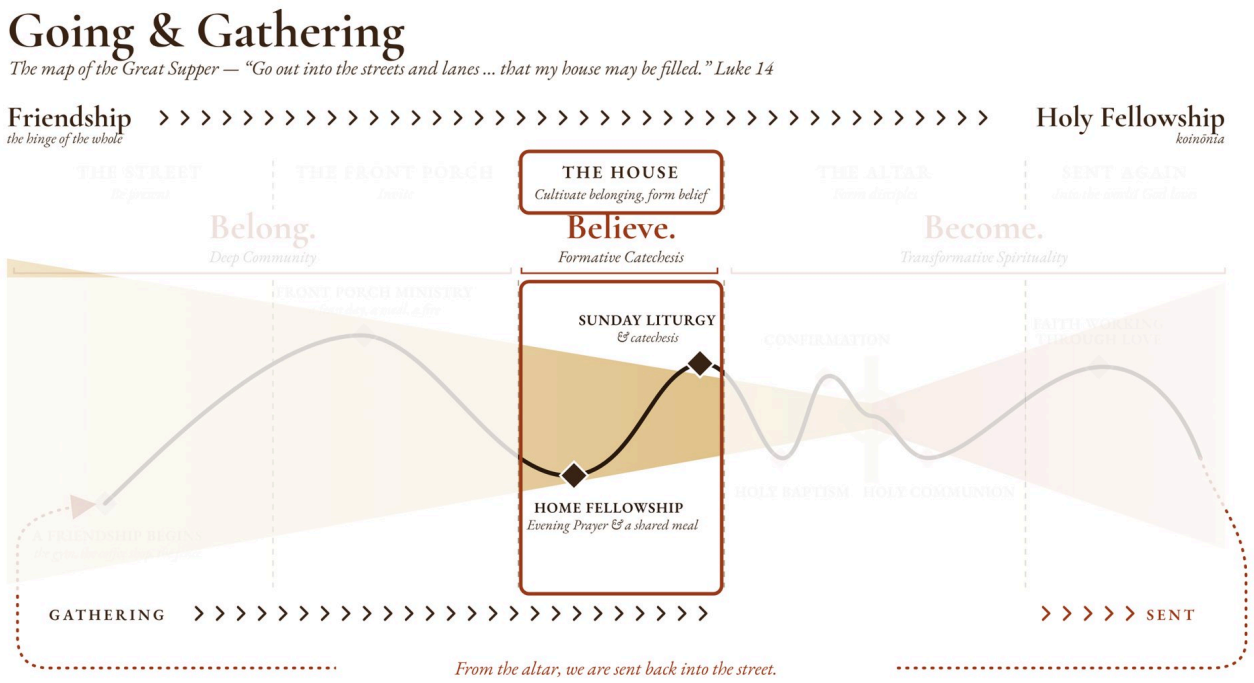
The hour

Pray	5 min
Report: Sunday	10 min
Read aloud	5 min
Discuss	15 min
Do: draw the path	25 min
Decide & close	10 min

A word to the convener
Belonging is the soil, not the harvest. Keep the conversation moving toward the altar.

◆ READ ALOUD

Further In, and Up to the Table



But a porch is a threshold, not a destination. Those who linger there must be welcomed further in, into the house. St. Benedict wrote, "Let all guests who arrive be received as Christ." That sentence should stand over the door of every parish. The house is deeper belonging: home fellowships with Evening Prayer and a shared meal, parish suppers, study groups, and catechesis cohorts where questions are welcome.

For many, belonging will come before believing. That does not mean belief is unimportant, or that everyone welcomed is thereby a Christian without professing faith through the grace of Holy Baptism. It means we do not demand that people resolve every question before they may come into the house. Yet **belonging is the soil, not the harvest.** People must hear the Gospel; they need Scripture, the Creeds, the Catechism, and patient company through a long and uncertain season.

And all of it is leading somewhere: to the table the Master has prepared. The altar is the heart and center of the house. Every invitation leads at last to Holy Baptism and Confirmation, to the Holy Communion, and to a life transformed in Christ. Our sacramental life is not a private possession to be guarded from the world; it is the very life into which Christ gathers his people. And at the altar the circle turns: those gathered in are sent out again.

◆ DISCUSS · 15 MINUTES

Is There Room in the House?

1 Seen through a visitor's eyes, what in our Sunday worship welcomed, confused, or moved you?

2 Where can someone still asking questions belong among us right now?

3 How do we explain our worship generously, without making it less distinct?

4 Who could accompany an inquirer through a long or uncertain season?

◆ DO · PART ONE

Make Room in the House

Mark what we already do well. Circle what we must strengthen.

- ☐ Someone explains the service without overwhelming a visitor.
- ☐ An existing group has room for a newcomer to join.
- ☐ Visitors receive a personal follow-up within the week.
- ☐ Newcomers meet people beyond the one who invited them.
- ☐ There is a regular place to explore the faith and ask questions.
- ☐ Preparation for Baptism and Confirmation is clear and offered.

◆ DO · PART TWO

Draw the Path to the Table

For each step, write what our parish offers now and who tends it. Leave a blank where something is missing.

STEP 1
First Welcome
a visit, an event

Who

STEP 2
Belonging
a group, a table

Who

STEP 3
Inquiry & Catechesis
Scripture, Creeds, Catechism

Who

STEP 4
The Altar
Baptism, Confirmation, Communion

Who

Where is the path broken or missing? What must we strengthen first?

◆ DECIDE · SESSION FIVE

Carries forward: "Hospitality and follow-up"

Hospitality and follow-up will be overseen by:

The next step we will offer to anyone who wants to learn or belong:

Recorded by (scribe)

Date

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Pray for all preparing for Baptism and Confirmation, and for those not yet ready to ask. Then the Lord's Prayer.

BEFORE SESSION SIX

Name one thing our parish does out of habit that no longer serves its purpose.

SESSION SIX

6 An Honest Diagnosis

The Small and Effective Church · Four Objections

"For who hath despised the day of small things?"

ZECHARIAH 4:10

◆ PRAY

Gracious Father, we humbly beseech thee for thy holy Catholic Church; that thou wouldst be pleased to fill it with all truth, in all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in any thing it is amiss, reform it; where it is right, establish it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of him who died and rose again, and ever liveth to make intercession for us, Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. **Amen.**

A Prayer for the Church, The Book of Common Prayer (1928)

BY THE END OF THIS SESSION

Your team will tell real limits from assumed ones, and choose one thing to stop, simplify, or change to make room for mission.

FOR THE CONVENER

Time
60–75 minutes

Bring
Each member's "one habit" from the last session, and the parish calendar and budget.

Roles
Convener and scribe. Invite the senior warden.

The hour

Pray	5 min
Read aloud	5 min
Discuss	20 min
Do: diagnose	15 min
Do: work an objection	15 min
Decide & close	10 min

A word to the convener
This session asks for honesty and charity in equal measure. Name habits, not people.

◆ READ ALOUD

Small, and Effective

A small parish does not have to think small. Smallness does not disqualify a parish from mission, and size alone does not tell us whether a parish is healthy. We rejoice in growth when God gives it. But a small parish may possess gifts a large one envies: intimacy, flexibility, a strong common life, and the ability to truly know a newcomer by name.

Let us also be honest. Some parishes are small because they have turned inward and quietly closed the porch. Smallness is neither proof of failure nor a guarantee of health. The question is not how to imitate a large church with fewer resources, but how to be healthy and fruitful with the people and gifts God has given.



Size shouldn't be viewed as an obstacle to effectiveness, but rather as a spur to the missional imagination.

FOUR OBJECTIONS, AND A FAITHFUL RESPONSE

"We're too small."

Smallness does not disqualify a parish from mission. Begin with the people and gifts God has given.

"We don't have the money."

Money cannot buy love, patience, prayer, or presence: the very things mission cannot do without.

"We only have one priest."

Mission was never reserved to the clergy. The priest teaches, forms, equips, and leads the people of God.

"Our worship is too strange."

Inhabit the tradition faithfully; explain it generously. The liturgy is the life we invite people to discover.

The small-church material in this session is adapted from the author's teaching, The Small, and Effective Church, developed in conversation with Karl Vaters, Small Church Essentials (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018).

◆ DISCUSS · 20 MINUTES

What Is Really Holding Us Back?

1 What in our parish is life-giving, healthy, and fruitful?

2 Where have we become inward-focused, resistant, inaccessible, or simply tired?

3 Which of the four objections do we hear most? Is it a fact, a fear, or an assumption?

4 What would a neighbor encounter if they tried to draw near to us?

◆ DO · PART ONE

Stuck, or Strategic?

Mark every description that honestly fits your parish. Most parishes will find themselves on both sides.

WHEN SMALLNESS MAY BE STUCK

- ☐ **Small by mistake:** practices or leadership patterns no longer serve the mission.
- ☐ **Small by exclusion:** habits or barriers keep newcomers at a distance.
- ☐ **Frozen in time:** unwilling to adapt or respond to the community.

WHEN SMALLNESS MAY BE STRATEGIC

- ☐ **With a purpose:** a community where people can be known and pastored.
- ☐ **For a while:** a season in the life of a developing mission.
- ☐ **For infiltration:** able to reach places larger churches may not.

◆ DO · PART TWO

From Objection to Faithful Experiment

Take the objection the team hears most, and work it through.

WORK THE QUESTION	OUR RESPONSE
1. Name it. State the objection honestly.	
2. Diagnose it. A capacity issue, a habit, or a strategic choice? What evidence do we have?	
3. Declutter. What can we stop, simplify, share, or repurpose before adding anything?	
4. Imagine. What one small, faithful response fits our gifts and place?	

◆ DECIDE · SESSION SIX

Carries forward: "What we will simplify"

One thing we will stop, simplify, or change:

What this frees us to do:

Recorded by (scribe)

Date

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Offer the parish as it truly is, its gifts and its limits, into God's hands. Then the Lord's Prayer.

BEFORE SESSION SEVEN

Reread every Decide box in this workbook. The rector proposes dates for the 30-day and 90-day reviews.

SESSION SEVEN

7 Build the 90-Day Plan

Begin Where You Are · Sent Again

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

EPHESIANS 2:10

PRAY

Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favour, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally, by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Book of Common Prayer (1928)

BY THE END OF THIS SESSION

Your team will have assembled the 90-day plan from its six decisions, set the review dates, and signed the Parish Commitment.

FOR THE CONVENER

Time
75 minutes

Bring
Every member's workbook, the parish calendar, and a pen for signing.

Roles
The rector, the senior warden, and the whole team.

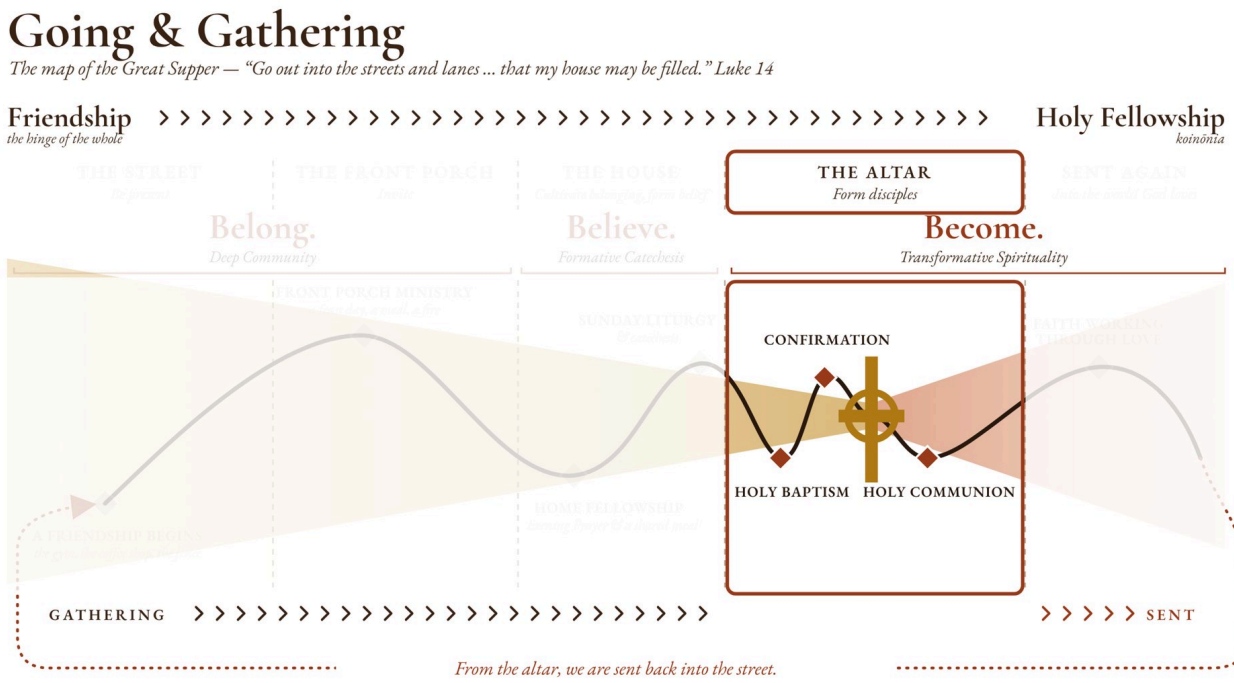
The hour

Pray	5 min
Read aloud	5 min
Readiness check	10 min
Assemble the plan	35 min
Sign the commitment	10 min
Close in prayer	10 min

A word to the convener
The aim is not to do everything. It is to take the next faithful step.

◆ READ ALOUD

Sent Again



And here, at the altar, the circle turns. Those gathered in are sent out again, to "do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in." We are sent, we gather, and we are sent again. You do not need to do everything at once. You need only begin faithfully: one practice of going, one practice of gathering, a welcome planned, and dates set to learn from what happens. We should still count, and still care for the health of the parish. But the numbers must serve the mission, not replace it.

◆ READINESS CHECK · 10 MINUTES

- ☐ We can say why mission flows from the love of God, not the wish to grow.
- ☐ We have defined our Parish Mile.
- ☐ We know who will welcome newcomers and follow up.
- ☐ We are praying for our neighbors by name.
- ☐ We have chosen one realistic practice of going, and one of gathering.
- ☐ There is a clear path to catechesis and the sacraments.

◆ DO · ASSEMBLE THE PLAN · 35 MINUTES

Our 90-Day Missional Plan

Copy each decision from its session's Decide box, then complete the last four lines together.

OUR PLAN	FROM	PARISH COMMITMENT
Our Parish Mile	*Session 2*	
People and places we pray for	*Session 1*	
One practice of going	*Session 3*	
One practice of gathering	*Session 4*	
Hospitality and follow-up	*Session 5*	
Next step for inquirers	*Session 5*	
What we will simplify	*Session 6*	
Who coordinates the work	*Today*	
Pastoral oversight	*Today*	
30-day check-in date	*Today*	
90-day review date	*Today*	



DECIDE · SESSION SEVEN

A Parish Commitment

As a parish, we desire to share more faithfully in the mission of God. We will begin with prayer, attend to the people and places God has entrusted to us, cultivate genuine Christian friendship, open our common life to our neighbors, and welcome them toward the table the Master has prepared.

The parish of

_____

_____ _____

Rector Senior Warden

_____ _____

Junior Warden Mission Team

_____ _____

Mission Team Mission Team

_____ _____

Mission Team Date

We must go to the street. We must open the front porch. We must welcome people into the house. We must gather them to the altar. And from the altar, we are sent out again.

Close by praying together the Prayer for Missions, and the Grace.

AFTER THIRTY DAYS

30 The Check-In

A listening review, not a performance evaluation. About 45 minutes.

◆ PRAY

Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that the words which we have heard this day with our outward ears, may, through thy grace, be so grafted inwardly in our hearts, that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good living, to the honour and praise of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Book of Common Prayer (1928)

LOOK BACK TOGETHER

- ☐ What friendships have begun or deepened?
- ☐ What invitations or doors have opened?
- ☐ What felt life-giving? What was difficult?
- ☐ What have we learned about our Parish Mile?
- ☐ Were newcomers welcomed and followed up?
- ☐ Are we still praying for our names daily?

Stories and observations

◆ DECIDE

One adjustment for the next sixty days:

AFTER NINETY DAYS

90 The Review

Celebrate signs of grace, tell the stories, and choose the next faithful step.

PRAY

Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto thee; and dost promise that when two or three are gathered together in thy Name thou wilt grant their requests: Fulfil now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants, as may be most expedient for them; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. **Amen.**

A Prayer of St. Chrysostom, The Book of Common Prayer (1928)

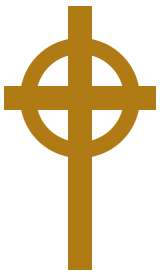
LOOK FOR	WHAT WE HAVE SEEN
Friendship	
Presence	
Invitation	
Belonging	
Belief and discipleship	
Parish culture	

Continue

Adapt

Begin next

"We should still count, and still care for the health of the parish. But the numbers must serve the mission, not replace it."



Gathered by grace.
Sent in love.

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

JOHN 20:21

Going & Gathering · A Parish Workbook

The Rev. Canon Michael D. Vinson
Reformed Episcopal Church · NEMA

APPENDIX

Handout & Worksheets

The pages that follow are the handout used in Part I and the four worksheets used in Part II. They may be printed and copied freely for parish use.

- **Part I Handout** · Going & Gathering, with the map (two pages, landscape)
- **Worksheet 1** · Stuck or Strategic?
- **Worksheet 2** · Five Loaves and Two Small Fishes
- **Worksheet 3** · Limitations into Solutions
- **Worksheet 4** · Clarifying Missional Effectiveness

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 Church does not become missional because it is declining. **The Church is missional because God is missional.**

FOLLOW ALONG

I **The Question Beneath Our Questions**
Before we ask what to do, remember who we are.

II **The Sending God**
"As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." John 20:21

III **Heart Precedes Hands**
Mission flows from a heart formed at prayer and at the altar.

IV **Going & Gathering**
The Great Supper, Luke 14. Street · Front Porch · House · Altar. See the map overleaf.

V **Four Objections**
Too small · No money · One priest · Too strange

VI **Begin Where You Are**
Four steps, starting this week.

NOTES

YOUR PARISH MILE

Three places

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

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Three names

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

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

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

BEGIN WHERE YOU ARE

☐ **1. Pray and pay attention**
Ask God for his heart for your neighbors.

☐ **2. Define your Parish Mile**
The people and places already within reach.

☐ **3. One going, one gathering**

Going: _____

Gathering: _____

☐ **4. Review what you learn**
At thirty and ninety days. Let the numbers serve the mission.

Going & Gathering Workbook

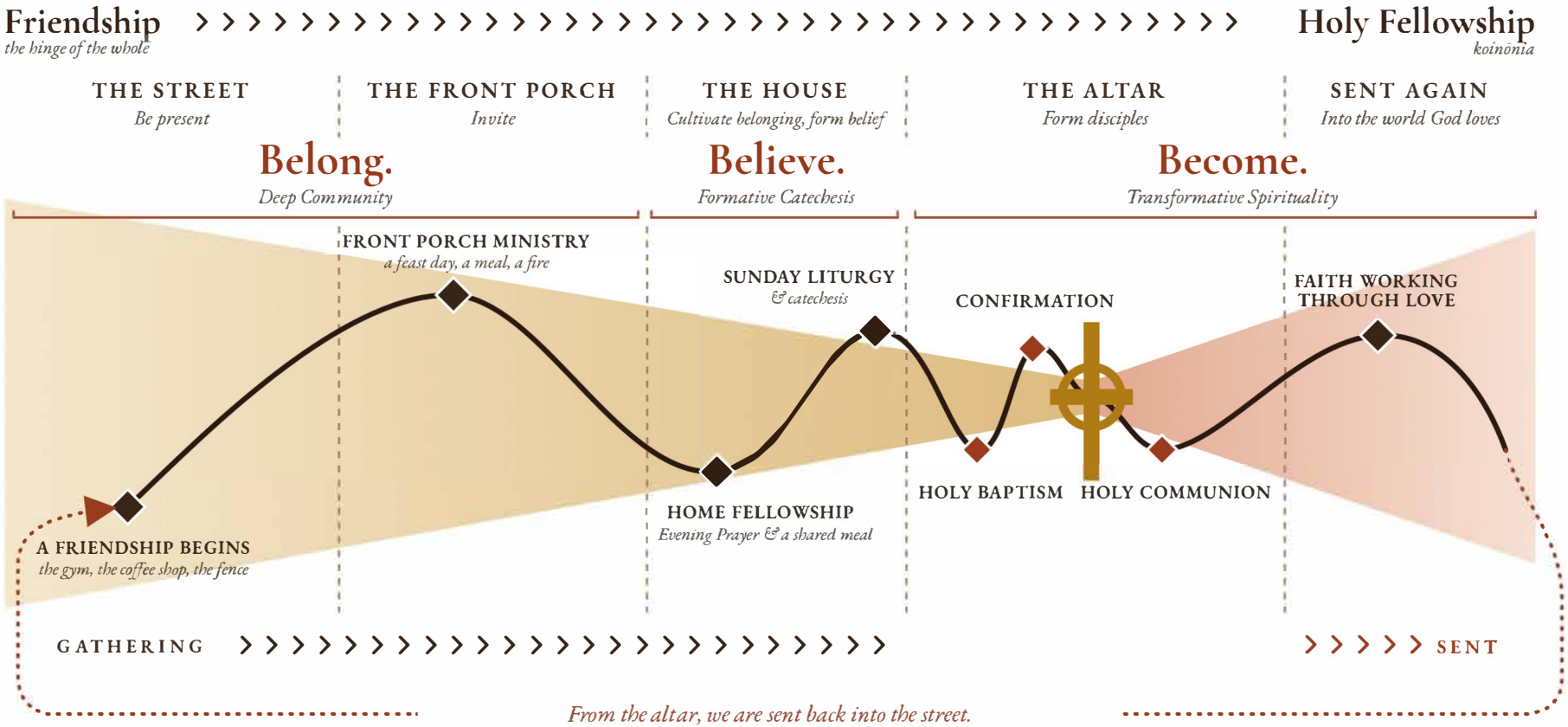
To assist rectors, vestries, and churchmen discern, create, and implement an evangelism plan to recapture the missional heart of God.

Scan for the planning guide and 90-day worksheet.

◆ *Gathered by grace. Sent in love.* ◆

Going & Gathering

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



READ LEFT TO RIGHT

A friendship begins in the street, draws near on the front porch, comes into the house, and is gathered at last to the altar.

NARROW, THEN WIDE

The shape narrows as people are gathered toward Christ, and opens again because those who are gathered are sent.

NOT A LINE, A CIRCLE

Follow the dotted line: from the altar, we are sent back into the street. Not rigid stages; the Holy Ghost is not so tidy.

GOING & GATHERING · PART II

The Small *(Effective)* Church



Deploying the Gifts God Has Given · The Rev. Canon Michael D. Vinson · November 6, 2026

"There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?" JOHN 6:9

1 · REFRAME	2 · DIAGNOSE	3 · DISCOVER	4 · DEPLOY
the story we tell about smallness	why our parish is small	the gifts already in our hands	limitations into solutions

◆ WORKSHEET 1 · 2 MINUTES · ON YOUR OWN

Stuck or Strategic?

Be honest before God. On each line, fill in the circle that shows how much it describes your parish today. Most of us are a little of both.

WHY ARE WE SMALL?	NOT US		SOME		VERY US
STUCK					
Small by mistake — *doing important things poorly*	○	○	○	○	○
Small by exclusion — *barriers that keep others out*	○	○	○	○	○
Frozen in time — *unwilling to change or adapt*	○	○	○	○	○
STRATEGIC					
Small with a purpose — *to know, pastor, and love by name*	○	○	○	○	○
Small for a while — *a young mission, a season of rebuilding*	○	○	○	○	○
Small for infiltration — *leaven hid in three measures of meal*	○	○	○	○	○
Small by nature and gifting — *one member of the body*	○	○	○	○	○

Now circle the one line that most describes your parish. One gift we already have that could move us toward strategic:

Size is not an obstacle to effectiveness. Rather, it is a catalyst for missional imagination.

◆ WORKSHEET 2 · 5 MINUTES · WITH YOUR PARISH

Five Loaves and Two Small Fishes

Take inventory of the gifts already in your hands. Write what comes to mind; don't edit. Listen to everyone — someone may see the gifts the rest of you stopped noticing.

SIX GIFTS TO LOOK FOR Known · Needed · Household · Nimble · Rooted · Real

People

Who do we have, and what are they good at?

Places

Homes, building and grounds, spots in our Parish Mile

Practices

What do we already do well? Teaching, liturgical feasts, music, hospitality

Relationships

Schools, workplaces, civic groups, neighbors

Character

What is our parish's personality? What would a neighbor say we are known for?

◆ OUR TWO STRONGEST GIFTS

1 _____

2 _____

"All should be called for counsel … because the Lord often reveals what is better to the younger." — The Rule of St. Benedict 3

◆ WORKSHEET 3 · 8 MINUTES · WITH YOUR PARISH

Limitations into Solutions

"Make the men sit down." Our Lord ordered what was there, gave thanks for it, and put it into his disciples' hands. Do the same with your limitations.

---

1 · Tick the two limitations most real for your parish — or name your own.

- ☐ Lack of clergy and staff
- ☐ Limited finances
- ☐ Inadequate space or location
- ☐ Low or no visibility
- ☐ Difficulty shepherding everyone
- ☐ Personal time constraints
- ☐ Other: .....

The rule: every solution must use at least one gift from Worksheet 2. No solving it by wishing for more money, more clergy, or more people.

2 · For each, write one small-church solution.

LIMITATION A _____

Our small-church solution

.....

.....

The gift we'll use ..... *Who could lead it* .....

LIMITATION B _____

Our small-church solution

.....

.....

The gift we'll use ..... *Who could lead it* .....

◆ **3 · A SOLUTION WORTH STEALING**

Heard from another parish in the room:

_____

_____

◆ WORKSHEET 4 · 8 MINUTES · WITH YOUR PARISH

Clarifying Missional Effectiveness

Put it all on one page. Fill in what you can — you will not finish, and you need not.

FIRST, DECLUTTER BEFORE YOU ADD

1 · What has ceased to be effective?

2 · What costs more than it is worth?

3 · Planting today, would we begin this?

4 · Can it be refreshed, or should it end?

5 · What do we wish we didn't have to do?

One ministry to refresh or lay down with thanks: .....

	Belong DEEP COMMUNITY	**Believe** FORMATIVE CATECHESIS	**Become** TRANSFORMATIVE SPIRITUALITY
Existing What we already do			
Evolve · Adjust · Conclude What needs to change, or end well			
New One thing to begin, using our gifts			

◆ OUR ONE NEXT STEP

_____

_____

Who will take it home _____ Begin by _____

Take this page to your rector, vestry, and Going & Gathering Team. The *Going & Gathering* parish workbook will carry it to a ninety-day plan.

"Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." — John 6:12