



## Planning

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Thank you for considering this material for your church or group. We hope you find it offers a powerful way forward in your church and community as you listen for God's voice and seek your next steps of following Christ.

**Preliminary:** This study is intended to be *introductory* so that a congregation might begin a process of self-discovery, and rebirth and renewal of mission and ministry, in your own community. Change is all around us and demands our positive engagement and response. *Application of missiological principles* in an established congregation can have useful consequences though it may be challenging. Of course, just as a ship at sea may best make a turn by degrees instead of an abrupt 180 degree turn, the intent isn't to capsize or sink a church. Instead, the hope is for a greater dependence upon God and one another similar to the experience a mission team might have in a dynamic setting. Use this as an opportunity to reflect and evaluate your church ministry and create together a new chapter of ministry with focus on reaching the community and discipleship as priorities. Adapt these materials to your context and "next steps" as a way to build consensus through study, prayer, discussion, and application. In many ways this is a "recipe" which you can adapt to your context and needs.

There is much packed into each of these sessions that can be tailored to your situation and invites further exploration. I, and many others at the North Georgia conference office and with UMC Global Ministries, are available and would be glad to be of assistance if we can help your congregation move forward. There are abundant resources offering information, study, and application at your disposal. Many of us especially enjoy the training and coaching that can assist a congregation in contextually appropriate application of these best principles and practices. As with any habit, it's usually a step at a time that we best learn and grow. Note this is an imperative for every congregation to be in vital relationship with God and neighbor, so it's an ongoing task. We can all use a larger coaching team and assistance in this challenging adventure of following Christ today.

These sessions could work well with church leadership, mission or evangelism committees, whole church studies, or with small groups or Sunday School classes. It is intentionally geared toward

*reflection, discussion, and application.* It assumes some depth of knowledge of Scripture, Methodist history and doctrine, and church practice, so depending on the participants, appropriate supplementary material may be necessary to aid your particular group. It is advisable for leaders or facilitators to preview the next session to give a teaser to your group and perhaps to give some basic homework or information if that will help them to be prepared the following week.

New and different people in your congregation, and that is a certain number/percentage to create a *different momentum* both in church and community, are what you most need. You need to see, experience, and enjoy the larger arena of God's work beyond the congregation. This larger *kingdom of God* approach will change the church and community dynamics. Yet this is also what you most fear. Instead of expecting folk to join you and match your style and approach what would it look like for the church to flex itself to meet the needs of these neighbors in your community? This creates an exciting environment of worship and discipleship which is true to Good News and helps us beyond the current congregational apathy, illness, or death spiral.

This approach offers great potential beyond merely being an exercise of a study or discipleship group. Note the recommendations regarding worship and prayer ministry for becoming a Lazarus Church, a congregational with vital connection in the community and in *missio Dei*, to engage in this as a holistic, all church process of renewal and congregational resurrection.

**Meeting Location:** Note this is a *key element* which should be carefully considered!

Don't assume with this study that the best location for the meetings would be the church building. In fact, I'd highly advise *meeting at a variety of places within your community*. It reinforces the study, changes the conversation (you know how people talk in the church versus the ways we might converse in various public settings in our community), plus might even allow you to better involve other people in the discussion. You can see in the different sections where it would be very useful to bring in other voices, community experts, and folk from outside the church. The challenge here may be to get into some depth of sharing and communication so that participants don't overly adjust to speak to what they expect a church crowd will want to hear! Learning how to solicit community voices, to honestly and authentically know and hear from people in the community, and to build community relationships can be a key element of this study that drives both the context, approach, and content. Imagine this study launching a new day for the church in the community and work hard in the preparation, prayer, and publicity to make it a reality. The caveat in this is that you want to be in locations where you can have a depth of conversation that everyone in the group can hear and engage deeply.

If you are in public settings, unless you have a private room, it may be that you can't use the video component unless you bring a laptop and small projector and make arrangements. Here are some suggestions regarding meeting location:

- **Introductory Session:** Meet at the church in a comfortable room for introductions and initial discussion.
- **Session 1:** Do you meet in a cemetery or at a dead church? Either would be a strong experience. If there isn't an empty church building of a dead church you might be able to meet in a closed business or similar setting. Weather permitting meet another option could be to set up class in your church parking lot, or somewhere with similar strong interaction with the community, so

that the contrast of the topic with the noise and aliveness of the community is an obvious counterpoint.

- **Session 2:** Meet at a location where one of the scriptures of the session, or a story from the ministry of Jesus, might come alive in the context. Choose a street, or home, or well, or mountain, or body of water that is within 15 minutes of your congregation's building where the Kingdom of God is alive or ought to be alive.
- **Session 3:** What is THE location that best describes or defines your community? This could be a positive or negative. Meet in that place. Another possible option could relate to the people groups, the tribes, of your community. Meet in the place that is where your church tribe, and the people group you best reach, both frequent and can interact. Perhaps you meet in someone's home who lives within 5 minutes of the church.
- **Session 4:** Where is an "urgent" type location in your community where you could be in proximity yet hold a study? Perhaps a meeting room at a hospital, or at or near a fire station, or school, or social services? Maybe there is a room to meet at a local mission partner location. Just make sure the setting is more than a "band aid" type mission and truly conveys a sense of urgency and doing the most important work.
- **Session 5:** Early Methodists were circuit riders, so a horse and rider conveyed much about movement and going to the frontier with the Gospel. What does it look like for your church to be part of the kingdom of God movement in your community? Meet in a location which capitalizes on the Body of Christ symbolism for your congregation actively involved in community life. Perhaps this is back at your church building. Or maybe through the discussions the group has identified a place outside the brick and mortar congregation that truly conveys what it means for your church to be the living Body of Christ in the community. Meet in the place where your community of believers is most alive as the future church called to new life.

**Lesson Plan:** If you meet in the locations off site you may need to adjust your approach somewhat to fit the setting. In general it is helpful if you have a staged area, or private room, or location that allows for strong small group interaction and discussion. In general, most folk do best with a one hour to 90 minute discussion. Since this material is sensitive, provocative, and is discussion oriented a wise group facilitator will want to be in touch with the personalities and group dynamics. It will likely be useful to set *guidelines* of communication and repeat as necessary. Reinforcing respectful listening, engaging everyone, allowing for disagreement and doubt, encouraging confronting tough issues, and dissuading domination or "old scripts" can be a way for the sessions, and in fact the church, to move forward.

A leader will probably want to dig into all of the sessions to get a sense of this flow and sense of the possibilities with implementing this in a different way than is often done in church studies. This study is *both an individual and group process*. A typical session may include gathering, a time for "checking in" and centering in prayer, a reminder of the process issues and what the particular session theme is about, and then the majority of time on the key missional concepts, scripture, and discussion.

A movement of small group discussion and then larger group discussion of highlights, i.e. not each group reporting, can be a useful way to proceed. A key will be for the facilitator to manage the time, assist in the group discussion and wisdom to rise to the surface, and conclude with a good segment of time devoted to application for the congregation.

Note this is a Lazarus Church focus on hearing God through Scripture and one another even as we attempt to listen to the community. So, the group will be listening, praying, dreaming, and talking about the resurrection of their congregation, the next step of faith in Christ, the new creation God is awakening in them. If it were my group I'd think:

*Gathering, Prayer, and Focus: 10 minutes*

*Focus Mission Issues: 15 minutes*

*Scripture: 15 minutes*

*Church Application: 15 minutes*

*Closing with Preview and Prayer: 5 minutes*

This allows for flexibility as some groups will dig deeper in certain sessions or particular elements. Further, it allows plenty of time if a group desires to go over in discussion if the Holy Spirit is especially strong and more time needs to be taken. The group leader will do well too help the session move beyond easy, pat answers into some depth of sharing, truth, and expectation of revelation from God. This isn't to say overly spiritualized or simplistic answers, but practical Methodist experience which helps the church to find new life.

### Extra Missio Dei Resources:

- "Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation: Mission"
- Useful way to get at holistic, comprehensive plan, Churches of Excellence in Outreach <http://www.ngumc.org/churchofexcellenceinoutreach>
- Take UVMIM Leader training every 3 years and receive new handbook as an ongoing growth in mission principles applied to church ministry. "United Methodist Volunteers in Mission: Team Leader Handbook"
- "Faithful Witnesses: United Methodist Theology of Mission," John Edward Nuessle. <http://shop.umc.org/faithful-witness>
- Variety of UMC mission resources, <http://www.umcmmission.org/Find-Resources/Resources>
- Theology of Mission, <http://www.umcmmission.org/Learn-About-Us/About-Global-Ministries/Theology-of-Mission>

### More Training or Consultation:

Contact Rev. Scott Parrish at [scott.parrish@ngumc.net](mailto:scott.parrish@ngumc.net) to share ideas, to tell how these sessions worked in your setting, to share ideas for improvement of the sessions, or to request more information or offer training or coaching in your church and community.

### Elements of the Lazarus Church material include:

- Planning (as with many things you may want to read the "planning" and "postscript" first)
- Worship and Application (sermon ideas)

- Intro (*this document*)
- Session 1- Lazarus Church & MISSIO DEI
- Session 2- FOCUS
- Session 3- CONTEXT
- Session 4- URGENCY
- Session 5- MOVEMENT
- Post Script