Living Local: A Missional Partnership of the Northwest Washington Synod
Initial Discerning and Deciding

An important step toward participating in the next round of Living Local is discernment. This involves time to build an understanding of the process among leaders of the congregations as well as assessing our internal readiness to join the work. Below are some important benchmarks in starting well:

- Share with your congregation the overall purpose and work of this journey together.
- Ensure that leaders have a sense of what is being asked of the congregation.
- Give pastors the opportunity to clearly understand their role in this process so that they can assess their own readiness to participate.

The following activities provide initial ways for doing this. Your pre-leadership team (not necessarily the same team that who will do the Living Local process) will work through these activities in partnership with a Living Local leader.

Activities include:

A. Review (pgs. 2-4) with the congregational leadership the main elements of the Living Local journey: pursuing a question, and learning 5-Step discernment process.

B. Dwelling in the Word (pg. 5) begins to be introduced and practiced in the congregation.

C. Establishing an “exploration team” (pg. 6) that works with Living Local leader through this part of the process.

D. Discerning readiness by engaging in exploratory questions (pg. 7) with congregational leaders.

E. Following these elements the congregational leadership will meet with Living Local leader to assess readiness and discern next steps to begin the next cohort.
The Living Local Journey – What’s It All About?
Living Local is an invitation to congregations to go on a journey. It’s a journey of learning and discovering among and with neighbors and neighborhoods. The process is centered by an exploration around a central, guiding question.

"How do congregations journey with the Spirit of Christ in our neighborhoods, in order to join God in those places?"

Living Local is a discernment process that helps to promote congregational life in two central ways. The first is by discovering the larger context that God has placed the congregation into. The second is learning an imagination for where and with whom God might be calling congregations to participate with more often. In this way, Living Local offers possibilities to actively engage a congregation’s vocational life among neighbors and neighborhoods through awareness, imagination, and involvement. This grassroots process is engaged through four key practices of listening, discerning, experimenting, and reflecting.

Four Practices
Listening – What might God be saying to us?
Listening is active and participatory. In order to join with what God is already doing in our neighborhoods, we need to listen. We need to pay attention through the lenses of curiosity and expectation that God is at work. The place to begin is to learn how to pay attention to what God is already doing in our midst.
We listen to God, we listen to one another and we listen to our neighborhood and communities.

Discerning – Why might God be saying this to us?
Discerning is a discovery process in community with others. It’s about identifying some initial ways the Spirit might be nudging us. Discerning is deeply rooted in listening activities that have taken place, bringing together the listening of many and wondering together about collective next steps.
We ask what might God be up to in our neighborhoods.

Experimenting – How can we learn more about where God is leading us?
Experimenting is testing our hunches about where we think the Spirit might be nudging. It is about trying something new in order to learn more about what God is already doing. Success of an experiment is considered in terms of how much we learn from the experience rather than about our impact on others.
We try new actions and activities, testing and learning together.

Reflecting – What are we learning about where God is leading us?
Reflecting is taking time to explore what our actions are teaching us. It’s through reflecting on our actions that we deepen our understanding of God’s activity all around us.
We continue to try new things and ask what might we be learning together.
# Living Local: Congregations

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<td>- Listen to stories of God’s actions in the congregation through one another.</td>
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<td>- Participate in gathering with clergy to explore living into a new future.</td>
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Joining God – Living Local

FRAMING ASSUMPTIONS

1. **GOD IS DOING THE CALLING, CENTERING, AND SENDING:** God is inviting church to a new kind of attention for engaging our particular and plural Western contexts.

2. **OUR PRIMARY WORK IS DISCERNMENT:** Discerning God’s presence is the primary task. We seek to learn, understand and engage with what God is doing in the neighborhoods and communities where we live.

3. **THE SPIRIT IS LEADING THE PEOPLE OF GOD:** The Spirit cultivates an imagination to guide the challenges of mission and witness among the people of a local church. This is a Spirit-directed discernment journey of discovery and experience of God’s presence in and with the world.

4. **RE-ENGAGEMENT WITH PRACTICES:** We re-engage with classical practices, i.e. Dwelling in the Word, a modified form of Lectio Divina. This central practice opens up places for imagining where God might be showing up in our local communities.

5. **IN THE ORDINARY AND EVERYDAY:** The Spirit is at work in the ordinary of local congregations and their neighborhoods and communities. In our stories and listening we discern the fresh traces of God’s engagement among us.

6. **LEARNING TOGETHER:** Living Local guiding teams walk through the 5-step discernment practices in cohorts with other congregation teams in order to share their learning and discoveries with one another.

7. **LIVING LOCAL LEADER’S ROLE IS TO CULTIVATE ENVIRONMENTS** where local teams contextualize this work. Living Local leaders do not direct, manage, chair or function as the primary shaper of the journey.
Dwelling in the Word

Dwelling in the Word is a calling, centering, and sending practice for Living Local. It is a modified form of an ancient practice known as *lectio divina*. The reason this practice is such a key to the formative work of Living Local is that it provides the place where the Spirit opens up new imaginations to neighborhood living through the Word of God. Another reason is that it cultivates new kinds of attentiveness for learning how to listen to God through others. We use the Luke 10:1-12 text throughout Living Local journey, and encourage guiding teams to use this in their own monthly meetings, as well as to introduce it to other areas of congregational engagement.

1. Listening to the text
2. Sharing the text with a reasonably friendly looking stranger
3. Reporting on the text to the group

Luke 10:1-12
After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. 

He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. 

Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. 

Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. 

Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!’ 

And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. 

Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. 

Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; 

cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ 

But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, 
go out into its streets and say, 

Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’ 

I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

The Questions (respond to one):

a. Where did your imagination stop?

b. Are there words, phrases, ideas that grasp you?

c. What are you hearing in this text (where might the Spirit be nudging)?
The Exploration Team

The *Exploration Team* guides the overall process in their congregation.

1. Each Exploration Team works in partnership with an external coach, provided by Living Local leadership, who will assist them along the journey.

2. Comprised of lay people, not clergy. When clergy are members, invariably, the team defaults to their expertise or advice and the process ceases to be genuinely lay-based.

3. The pastor meets with the Exploration Team on a regular basis outside of ET planning meetings in order to:
   a. Support
   b. Assist in interpreting the tasks and learning
   c. Provide theological/biblical framing where appropriate

4. The pastor does not:
   a. Participate in ET meetings
   b. Take on any ET work
   c. Provide coaching for the ET

5. The ET is not the same people as the congregation council. It consists primarily of lay leaders not currently serving on the official board. Councils have their own important work to do and don't have time to focus on Guiding Team work. There can be one or two council members on the team but no more.

6. Reports to the Board so that the Board knows what’s happening.

7. Comprised of 6-8 people (depending on church size).

8. Characteristics of ET members:
   i. Deep, genuine commitment to the church and its people
   ii. Support the leadership and this process, and willingness to experiment
   iii. Caught a vision for joining with God in the local context
   iv. Can realistically implement processes
   v. Good relational skills
   vi. Knows how to effectively communicate across the congregation
   vii. Aware of opportunities and barriers to change
   viii. Able to effectively bridge differences
Discernment Questions:
Living Local leaders engage the following with the Exploration Team in order to discern this work for their congregational setting.

Tell me some stories that, for you, capture the ‘energy’ of people in the congregation.

How do you see people in the congregation addressing the challenges you face?
How many people are doing this? What are people’s spirits and attitudes like?

What do you think are people’s attitudes toward taking risks are in this congregation?
What have you seen in terms of risks that reach out to others around you?

In what ways do you see people exploring and implementing new initiatives beyond the walls of the church? What are examples of some of these?

As you look back over the last several years where have most new initiatives been generated?

Can you describe some of the basic emotions and feelings present across the congregation these days?

How would you assess the levels of appreciation, criticism, concern and complaint?

In your opinion where is this church putting most of its energy these days?