



Discovering Assets, Wows & Needs in our Congregations & Communities: A Toolkit

**Doing What Matters in New England
Phase 2**

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Doing What Matters in the New England Synod - *IMPORTANT FORM!*



Do what *matters*

Introduction

How do we Begin to Go Where Love Leads?

Discovering Assets, Wows(!) and Needs by Listening to Our Community & to Each Other

Background:

God is on a mission to reconcile the whole creation and set people free. The purpose of our lives – and of the church – is to participate in that mission in whatever way we can. We are called to Do what matters! That's why the number one question we should be asking everyday, in every single situation, is: What in the world is God up to and how can we help? Sometimes it's good for a congregation – or a synod – to spend intentional time in prayer and conversation to answer that question together.

That's what the "Doing What Matters" process in the New England Synod is all about. In order to give a sharper and more missional focus to our work together as a synod, our synod leaders have been listening for God's purpose & direction.

Every congregation and every member of the synod has been invited into the process of helping us wrestle with the question: What exactly is God's purpose for us, as the people of the New England Synod, and how does God want us to focus our resources for the sake of fulfilling that purpose?

One outcome of this process has been a new purpose statement and set of guiding principles that will guide the work of our synod over the next several years.

The Purpose of the New England Synod:

to go where love leads - to serve where love calls

Our Guiding Principles:

*pray always
give of ourselves
stand with others
embrace change and diversity
make room for joy*

The next phase of this process includes gathering information about the "assets, wows and needs" in our congregations and in the communities we serve as the New England Synod. The information we gather will help our new bishop and staff identify the strategic directions where we will begin to focus our energy, attention, and resources in the next several years.

This toolkit is designed to help you gather this information in your congregation and community. You can begin this process whenever it makes sense for you and your congregation, but ***we are asking that all information you gather be returned to the Synod Office no later than May 15, 2011.***

Getting Started:

When we listen to the Bible we seek to hear God's Word that is as valid and relevant for us today as it was to the original hearers of the Word. We try to locate ourselves in it and learn what God might have for us now. But our hearing is always conditioned by our time and place, by our personalities as individuals and together as a congregation, by the issues and needs that are most enduring to us and our communities at the moment.

So today we follow theologian Reinhold Niebuhr's lead and essentially read the Bible with one hand and the newspaper with the other. That is, we seek to hear God's call to "go" and to "serve" in context. We seek to hear it in the context of our community and our time—with its particular assets, wows(!), needs and issues. But we also hear God's call in light of the assets, passions and commitments of our particular congregation.



So the next step in our dance together is to GO; to go and listen to people in our community. Community may translate for you into communities—if the church serves people from more than one town or more than one school district, etc. But let's just say your community is the whole of those towns, neighborhoods and school districts where you have roots, influence and reach.

Drawing on the insights of ARE's PAWN process and their book: *Seeing Through New Eyes: The PAWN Process for Faith-Based Organizations* and from pieces developed for the New England Synod's Visioning Toolkit, we offer here some tools that may help you and your congregation begin to "go" where love leads . . . by listening to your community and to each other.

Feel free to mix and match the tools in this toolkit. Or make up your own way of gathering information about the assets, needs and wows in your community and congregation.

Just remember: God is on the loose! God is at work in our lives, in our congregations and in the lives of our neighbors. So let's take a look around. Let's talk to whoever will give us a minute. Let's really look at what we have, at what God's already doing and who God is using to do it – here in our congregations but also in our communities. Let's expect God to show us both the greatest needs in our communities and the assets we already have to begin to meet those needs together with old and new community partners.

**Let's be who we are, see what we have
and do what matters to God!**

The PAWN Process™

Practicing a renewable way of seeing



Tips for Doing a Community Survey

The survey process is as much about making connections and developing a short-term relationship with people, as it is about gathering information—even if it lasts only five minutes! The goal is to listen, not to argue a point. The purpose is to listen for people’s deepest pains and needs, as well as their greatest hopes and dreams. For each of those five minute conversations, you are your church embodying the gospel through a powerful ministry of listening!

The following are a few tips for participating in this form of listening:

1. Dress in comfortable, casual clothes.
2. Bring a clipboard for holding the survey papers and pen.
3. If conducting the survey in front of a store, be sure to get the approval of the manager in advance. You may want to call the store the week ahead, and remind the manager on duty again that morning.
4. As you approach someone entering or leaving the store, smile, be polite, look them in the eye, and tell them your name. Also tell them where you are from and what you are doing.
5. Ask them, “Could I have two minutes of your time to ask you a few questions about our community?” If they say “no,” don’t push it!
6. Listen intently. Record their answers, but make regular eye contact.
7. Do not challenge their answers, even if you have a strong reaction to a statement. If they are strongly “anti-church” you can simply say, “I’m sorry to hear that,” or “It sounds like your experience of churches has not been positive.”
8. This is also not a time to evangelize, other than through listening. We are not there to judge or debate issues with people, simply to collect information and discover more about community assets, wows and needs.
9. If they ask you again which church you come from, tell them. Feel free to try to answer any questions they ask, but let them set the agenda for the conversation!

(From the NE Synod Visioning Toolkit)

[Your Town] COMMUNITY SURVEY

Use the questions below to gather information about the assets, wows and needs in your community. Keep notes about what you hear in the spaces below. Begin with a brief introduction like this:

Hello, I'm _____ from _____ Lutheran Church in _____. I'm conducting a brief survey to help our church be better in touch with community needs and strengths. Could I have two minutes of your time?

QUESTIONS:

What do you think is the greatest need or issue in our community right now?

What do you believe are some of the strengths, assets or resources of our community?

What would make this community a better place to live?

What could our church and other community organizations be doing that could help you (and your family) and make our community stronger?

Who is doing work that makes a difference in our community? What could we learn from them?

Would you like to receive a copy of the results of this survey when we are finished?
(If yes, please have them write down their name & address on the back of this sheet.)

“Thank you for your time!”

When Your “Community” Comes to You!

Conversations With Folks Who Use Your Building

Many congregations host a variety of community groups in their buildings each week or each month. These groups are also “your community.” You may not have to GO to talk with them, because they are right in your classroom or fellowship hall every Tuesday night! Look at your church calendar and consider who you come in contact with through your building each week:

Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, AA, Ala-Non, music classes, your preschool, the garden club, the quilters, the domestic violence group, the weight loss group, the basketball team, the yoga classes, etc.

Approaching folks from these groups—parents, family members, etc.—is a way for “shy” congregations to begin to participate in community listening. You don’t even need to leave the building!

Be sure to keep notes about what you hear.

SOME QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK:

What is the best thing about living here?

What would you change if you could?

Who is doing work that makes a difference in our community? What could we learn from them?

What are the biggest needs or issues in this community?

What assets does the community have to resolve those issues or meet those needs?

What do you think the church could do to help?

“Thank you for your time!”

(From the NE Synod Visioning Toolkit)

Community Leader Interviews

A second way to get to know what God is up to in your community is to talk one-on-one with people who have specific insights. Make a list of who these people are. Your list might include: the mayor of your town or your city council representative, the principal of the school down the street or the school board president, the fire captain or police officer who covers your streets, the city or county planner, social service executives, service providers who work with poor or marginalized people, interfaith religious leaders.

In most cases, if you call these people on the phone or walk into their office to set up an appointment, they will be glad to talk with you. Simply explain who you are and that you are trying to get a better understanding of the community so that you can be a better neighbor and help make a difference. Most will be honored that you noticed they have expertise in the community.

The discussion with these people will not be too different from the ones you have with neighborhood residents. You should ask about assets, gifts and passions; the good stuff (i.e. wows!) already happening and the needs people in the community are facing. Take good notes.

QUESTIONS:

What do you see as the biggest strengths of our community?

What individuals and/or organizations do you think are really making a positive difference here?

What are the biggest issues facing our community and the people who live here?

What things do you think a helpful church/organization could do to benefit this community?

What could we do to make your work more effective?

Would you like to receive a copy of the results of this survey when we are finished?

Congregational Focus Group Conversation

A congregational focus group can be a fun and meaningful way to begin discovering what God is up to – and what God is calling you to do together. A focus group should gather from 5-12 people and ask them to spend approximately one hour together. Each group should have two facilitators – one who keeps the conversation going and one who takes notes. Be sure to open and close your conversation with prayer!

Here are a few tips for running a focus group in your congregation.

Gathering

We really do want to hear what people have to say. But the only way they will share what they're really thinking is if they feel safe. So, first and foremost, relax and smile. Create a warm and hospitable environment for them to gather. Make sure each person is greeted when they arrive and invited to put on a nametag, have a snack, and take a seat. Make sure each person has paper to write on and a pen/pencil.

Introductions

Once you begin, spend a few minutes in introductions. Introduce yourselves and explain what is happening and why. This is a chance for you to share why your congregation and the New England Synod are important to you, some of the great things that are already happening, and why this “Doing What Matters” process is important. Then ask each person to take a turn introducing themselves. This whole introduction piece should last no more than 5 minutes.

Suggested Methodology

- Write the question you're asking on a piece of flipchart paper.
- Ask each person to take 30 seconds and write down their answers on their own on a piece of paper.
- Then ask people to share their responses out loud. Write down everything everyone says. Don't let anyone argue! Let them know there are no right answers! If you need clarification, ask for it. Otherwise, just listen and focus on facilitating. Your job is to make sure every voice and every idea gets heard. Tell them not to feel “stuck” with the answers they wrote down but to add things that come to mind.
- Keep writing until it seems like everyone has finished adding.
- Once it seems like everyone has finished adding their thoughts and ideas, step back and ask everyone to reflect on what they see.
- Ask questions like: What do you notice? What “ah ha” moments are you having? Do you see any patterns emerging?
- Write down everything you hear.

Closing

With a big smile, warmly thank everyone for participating. Tell them again what is going happen next: Their input will be added to the voices of people in your congregation and across New England. What they've said will help develop strategic directions for our Synod – but also help shape what we do in our congregation.

Encourage them to take the online survey and get others to take it, too.

Suggested Congregational Focus Group Questions

What do you see as the biggest strengths of our congregation?

What individuals and/or groups do you think are really making a positive difference here?

What are the things people care most about and how can these be tapped to make a difference?

What are the most amazing things you've seen happen here as a result of our work together?

What are the biggest needs or issues facing the people in our congregation?

What are the biggest issues facing our community?

What are the strengths or assets of our congregation that might help meet those needs or connect with those in need?

Congregational Bible Study & Survey

Another way to gather information about the assets, vows and needs in your congregation is to use this Congregational Bible Study & Survey. You could do this together during worship or an educational hour on a Sunday morning or during a midweek event.

Introduction

We are being called to be who we are and see what we have for the sake of doing what matters to God. In order to give sharper focus to our work together as a congregation – and as the New England Synod – we are listening to God together. And your voice matters!

Bible Study

Before you dive into the questions below, take a few minutes to read Mark 8:14-21 and talk with each other about the following questions:

- a. When is a time you experienced Jesus “filling up your basket” to overflowing?
- b. What is the most important gift (in addition to salvation) Jesus has given you in your life?
- c. Do you ever “fail to see” and “fail to hear” what God is doing in your life? If yes, why do you think that is? Then, pray, thanking God for filling up our baskets and asking forgiveness for the times we fail to see. Finally, spend time writing your answers to the following questions:

Survey Questions

What do you see happening where you live and work – and in the neighborhood in which we worship – that is breaking God’s heart? What are the BIG ISSUES facing people in our community that we should be tackling together?

What do you see happening in the neighborhood in which we workshop and/or where you live and work that is making God smile? In other words, what are the GOOD THINGS happening in our community and who is doing them?

What do you see happening in our congregation that is making God smile? In other words, what are the GOOD THINGS happening in our congregation and who is doing them?

Make a list of the greatest gifts God has given to our congregation. In other words, what assets, passions, and resources does our congregation have that could be put to work in order to make a difference in our community?

What are the greatest needs that people in our congregation have?

If you have time, talk together about your answers. Have someone in your group take notes. Try to sum up the key points and turn those in with your written responses.

Making Sense of it All

So, what are you supposed to do with all of the information you've gathered from those community and congregational surveys, interviews and focus groups?!

I. Gather a few leaders from your congregation - pray together - and then start sorting.

God shows up "wherever 2-3 are gathered." So get a group of folks to help you. Be sure the pastor(s) and church council are included, but invite others to be a part of the conversations, too.

Read through everything that has been gathered. Take notes as you read. Write down the things that are jumping out at you, the patterns you're seeing, the things that tug on your heart, the things the Spirit tells you are important.

Your job isn't to analyze this information. Your job is to listen.

God speaks to us in many and various ways. God has something to say through the voices you've been listening to.

Try to hear it.

II. Talk about what you're hearing.

What is happening in our congregation that is making God smile?

What is happening in our congregation that is making God sad?

How about in our community? What are the good things happening "out there" that we should be part of?

What are the needs in our community that we should be addressing?

What are we hearing God call us, as leaders in this congregation, to do about all of this?

III. Decide to do something together that matters to God.

Don't worry about making the "right" decision. Just pick something that everybody seems excited about and try it.

Maybe pick a few things.

Then do it. And see what happens!

To learn more about using the PAWN process in your congregation - and doing what matters to God! - get a copy of "Seeing Through New Eyes" at the ARE online bookstore (www.arenwalenterprise.com). Use code ARECL for special discounts on all ARE resources!



A Message To Congregational Leaders

Thank you for being a part of the Do What Matters process of the New England Synod. The information that you are gathering will be read, processed, and used by our synod leaders to develop a set of strategic directions that will guide the work of our synod over the next several years. The articulation of those directions will take place in the Fall of 2012 and be shared as a part of the 2013 Synod Assembly.

But this process isn't just for the work that we will do together as the New England Synod.

You have been listening carefully to what God is saying through the people of your congregation. You have been listening to God through people in your community. And you are both invited and encouraged to use this information to shape the work that you do together, in your congregation. (cf. "Making Sense of it All" included in this toolkit).

You may even consider joining with other congregations in your area and sharing the information you've gathered. Wouldn't it be fun to "do what matters" to God --- together?!

Thanks for your leadership.

– The Doing What Matters Facilitateam

Doing What Matters in the New England Synod

The information you've gathered from your congregation and community will help us set some strategic directions for our work together as the New England Synod. In order to assist synod leaders in the process of making sense of what you've gathered, please answer the following questions and return this form to the Synod Office. This work should be done by a team of leaders from your congregation. The team should include the pastor(s) and at least 4 lay leaders. *Please return the form no later than May 15, 2011.*

Thank you for your participation in the Doing What Matters process!

1. Congregation Name & Address:
2. Contact person from your Congregation:
3. What are the biggest issues or greatest needs facing your congregation?
4. What is the most exciting or important thing your congregation is doing, has done lately and/or is planning?
5. What assets, resources and talents does your congregation have to contribute to the work that we do together as the New England Synod?
6. What are the greatest needs in your community?
7. What organization (both church groups and nonchurch groups) in your community is doing such great work that you think the New England Synod should consider partnering with them to do what matters?

STATE: _____

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Congregation & Community:
A Toolkit for the New England Synod**

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