

Wondering about the Church

Peggy Hahn, Executive Director for LEAD

SESSION DESCRIPTION

We were born for this. This is our watch as leaders and we want more than survival for our congregations and especially for the children, youth, and families we serve. We are called to lead the Christian movement forward in our own feeble little way—even if we are struggling to find the path ourselves. We can't focus on everything so we are compelled to set priorities. The process introduced in this session is effective for deepening faith and expanding the worldview of both leaders and congregations of all sizes and locations. It involves cultivating a new behavior that will open up our imagination as we join in God's Mission. This is the behavior of listening.

We are part of a long line of faithful servants who were often as unsure of themselves as we are. We are thinking about Abram and Sarai, Moses, Elizabeth and Mary, Peter and Paul, you get the drift. It may feel audacious to compare ourselves to these saints of the faith, yet we are convinced that on their watch, they had their own doubts and fears. We can courageously say that when we read scripture, we see that God's people have often felt uncertain as they followed God into the future. The first step they each took was to listen. We can do this!

ELCA FAITH PRACTICES

Encourage

Invite

Serve

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will . . .

- Understand the value of listening to God in prayer and scripture, in our congregation, and in our neighborhood
- Practice listening to God
- Practice listening to each other
- Be introduced to additional congregational resources to strengthen listening

BIBLICAL FOCUS

- Acts 10 - Peter's Vision

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Bibles
- Newsprint or white board

LESSON PLAN:

WHAT?

We all have biases and make assumptions based on our experiences. True listening starts with recognizing our own worldview and a willingness to set it aside to listen to others without judgement. This openness to discovering God in another person comes when we can see how God is working in our own lives and the lives of others.

Choose one of the activities below. Activity #1 is best if the group already has a relationship with each other or the facilitator is ready to debrief this experience. Activity #2 is best if the group does not know each other.

Activity #1 - My Personal Worldview (20 Minutes for activity and reflection)

Personal biases come from our life experiences. Ask the group to line up so they are all in one horizontal line in the center of the room. (Remove tables and chairs that may be in the way so everyone is in one long line facing the group leader.) Read each of the following statements that require people to either take a step forward or backward based on what is true for them. Read each question at a pace that allows movement without long periods of silence between each statement. Once all the statements are read, ask the group to notice where they are standing. Ask them to notice where others are standing. Invite reflection on this experience in small groups of three before inviting larger group reflection.

Questions for Activity:

1. If your parents worked nights and weekends to support your family, take one step back.
2. If you are able to move through the world without fear of sexual assault, take one step forward.
3. If you can show affection for your romantic partner in public without fear of ridicule or violence, take one step forward.
4. If you have ever been diagnosed as having a physical or mental illness/disability, take one step back.
5. If the primary language spoken in your household growing up was not English, take one step back.
6. If you came from a supportive family environment take one step forward.
7. If you have ever tried to change your speech or mannerisms to gain credibility, take one step back.
8. If you can go anywhere in the country, and easily find the kinds of hair products you need and/or cosmetics that match your skin color, take one step forward.

9. If you were embarrassed about your clothes or house while growing up, take one step back.
10. If you can make mistakes and not have people attribute your behavior to flaws in your racial/gender group, take one step forward.
11. If you can legally marry the person you love, regardless of where you live, take one step forward.
12. If you were born in the United States, take one step forward.
13. If you or your parents have ever gone through a divorce, take one step back.
14. If you felt like you had adequate access to healthy food growing up, take one step forward.
15. If you are reasonably sure you would be hired for a job based on your ability and qualifications, take one step forward.
16. If you would never think twice about calling the police when trouble occurs, take one step forward.
17. If you can see a doctor whenever you feel the need, take one step forward.
18. If you feel comfortable being emotionally expressive/open, take one step forward.
19. If you have ever been the only person of your race/gender/socio-economic status/ sexual orientation in a classroom or workplace setting, please take one step back.
20. If you took out loans for your education take one step backward.
21. If you get time off for your religious holidays, take one step forward.
22. If you had a job during your high school and college years, take one step back.
23. If you feel comfortable walking home alone at night, take one step forward.
24. If you have ever traveled outside the United States, take one step forward.
25. If you have ever felt like there was NOT adequate or accurate representation of your racial group, sexual orientation group, gender group, and/or disability group in the media, take one step back.

26. If you feel confident that your parents would be able to financially help/support you if you were going through a financial hardship, take one step forward.
27. If you have ever been bullied or made fun of based on something that you can't change, take one step back.
28. If there were more than 50 books in your house growing up, take one step forward.
29. If you studied the culture or the history of your ancestors in elementary school take one step forward.
30. If your parents or guardians attended college, take one step forward.
31. If you ever went on a family vacation, take one step forward.
32. If you can buy new clothes or go out to dinner when you want to, take one step forward.
33. If you were ever offered a job because of your association with a friend or family member, take one step forward.
34. If one of your parents was ever laid off or unemployed not by choice, take one step back.
35. If you were ever uncomfortable about a joke or a statement you overheard related to your race, ethnicity, gender, appearance, or sexual orientation but felt unsafe to confront the situation, take one step back.

Or Activity #2 - Triad Listening

This activity encourages deep listening and builds relationships. Each person will have an opportunity to play each of the three roles over 15 minutes. One person is *the listener (no talking, only listening)*, one person is *the interviewer (only asks questions, no sharing)* and one person is *the talker (answers questions as they wish)*. Use the set of questions below with each round as the people in the triad change positions. Time each round so that people are in their role for only 5 minutes.

Use the same questions for each round: (time suggestions are approximate)

1. Share a short story from your childhood that helps us know something important about where you grew up. (2 minutes)
2. Who or what has been most influential in your faith life and why? (2 minutes)
3. What is your biggest hope for the ministry you are leading right now? (1 minute)

Debrief the activity. What did you hear? Were there any deeper ah-ha God moments as you listened? How did it feel to go deeper in learning about the people in the room? How will this impact your relationship with them or others based on what you heard?

SO WHAT? (20 Minutes)

Read Acts 10 (PowerPoint slides available) and discuss the following:

Imagine yourself hanging out in the very early church of the First Century. This means letting go of our own worldview and trying as hard as we can to locate ourselves in Peter's world. This was a world where there was no "Christian" understanding. The followers of Jesus were practicing Jews who in addition believed that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. Think of them as a sect in Judaism that was not very popular with the Jewish leaders of the day. Peter, like the others, was still observing the purity code that prevented him from eating certain things, associating with certain people, and encouraged a life set apart from those around them who were caught up in the cult of the Roman Empire. To be Jewish meant to live differently than others in the community. Most worshiped a pantheon of gods while the Jewish community was monotheistic, deeply shaping every aspect of their unique culture.

Wonder together about Peter's transformation using these questions:

1. What is going on with Peter's vision? Reflect on his physical state, his spiritual state, and his emotional state as he encounters God. Use the PowerPoint slides to guide the conversation.
2. How did Peter's view of God shift based on this experience? How does what happened next help you know this? What do you know about Cornelius and his family from this scripture? Why was Peter's behavior surprising, even for him?
3. What significance does Peter's words in Acts 10: 34-36 have on the trajectory of the early church?

Wonder together about our own transformation using these 21st Century Christianity questions:

1. What have you been learning about yourself or others as you ponder these scripture readings? What questions do these texts raise for you? For your congregation?
2. How is your view of God shifting, based on these scriptures? What about your view of God's people, like Peter?
3. What about your view of those on the outside of the community like Cornelius? Who is outside of the community based on the current membership of your congregation?
4. What significance does this have for listening to God as you move to listening in the congregation? Or the neighborhood?

NOW WHAT?

Throughout scripture, God moves people of faith from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Think about your own congregation. Use these questions for some honest conversation:

1. If your congregation disappeared tomorrow, what would the neighborhood miss?
2. Why does your congregation exist?

Listening to God in scripture and prayer, in the congregation, and in the neighborhood provides three great listenings that open up new possibilities for joining in God's mission.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

LEAD's Tune In Process: a 10 step journey that creates outward movement based on deep listening. LEAD has coaching and tools available to help congregations make listening a way of life as they connect deeply in their neighborhood. You can learn more at waytolead.org/tune-in.

[LEAD's Listening Cards](#): each card offers a thoughtful question for individual and group reflection. Using these questions as prompts for discussion have proven to help groups expand their capacity to listen. Available at waytolead.org/art-journaling

LEAD's From Where I Sit Dinner Party: this is a model for small groups using a shared meal as a place to talk and listen with deep respect for diverse views on crucial conversations.

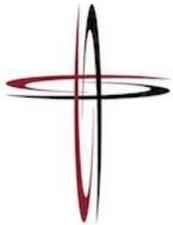
You can learn more at waytolead.org.

Video:

https://www.ted.com/talks/ernesto_sirilli_want_to_help_someone_shut_up_and_listen

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Peggy Hahn serves as the Executive Director for LEAD, aligning passionate leaders, resources, and practices to grow Christian leaders who grow faith communities in our world. Peggy is a frequent speaker and author who is committed to listening to pastors and leaders of all ages for insight into the ways they are growing in their own faith and what LEAD can do to support them in their development as leaders.



**PRACTICE
DISCIPLESHIP**

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