

CHANGE: ARE YOU READY?

If Jesus lived among us today, would he be in our churches?

In Luke Chapter 2, we read that Mary and Joseph find young Jesus in the temple learning from the rabbis and religious leaders. But beyond that time, the biblical narrative places Jesus mostly outside of the temple interacting with those on the margins of society — women; tax collectors; the poor; the sick; the forgotten.

Jesus called to leadership those who labored, who were street-smart, who served.

Jesus offered a new way of addressing scarcity — “You feed them...” — that involved all in the solution and offered a new form of community.

The cynical among us might assume that Jesus was simply being practical, building a new order from those who were not already claimed by the religious establishment. If we are so cynical, have we become like the religious establishment of Jesus’ time? Have we become the established church that John Wesley rejected when he began to preach out-of-doors?

All of us want our congregations to thrive, grow and have purpose. But many of us are concerned about how our preferences for church as we’ve known it might change if we become more like Jesus or John Wesley in their bold and unconventional invitations and interactions.

This resource provides some guidance for reflecting on our readiness to be on the margins, which is where **inclusion**, **innovation** and **multiplication** teeter. **Are you ready?**



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INGREDIENTS

1. **Humility** in our self-assessment.
2. **Curiosity** about our neighbors and community.
3. **Honesty** in the breadth of our faithfulness.

1. Describe your congregation in relationship to the community.

As accurately as you can, describe the demographics of your congregation including but not limited to:

- Age range and average age
- First languages spoken
- Sexual orientation and gender identities
- Races and ethnicities
- Economic and educational statuses

Research the demographics of your community using MissionInsite or other credible demographic resources.

Being careful not to judge or justify, compare the demographics of the congregation to the demographics of the community.

Where do the congregation and community align? Where do they differ?

3. Collect information to inform your understanding of demographics and demographic shifts.

Among worshipers, who has an important perspective on the community, its assets and its needs? These persons may be teachers or school administrators, first responders, or social workers. Have a conversation with these persons to gain some additional insight on the community, then reflect with others about what you heard.

Who in the community might you converse with to hear their experience of assets and needs? Schedule appointments with city planners, social services professionals, or others. Go and listen, then reflect back with your team. You will find generosity among those who care as you do.

(reference to one-to-one card)

2. Reflect on your emotional response to the demographic analysis.

What do you celebrate in this analysis?

What do you mourn?

What fears do you hold for the future life and ministry of the congregation given the demographic shifts?

What fears come up regarding your place in the life of this congregation?

What do you most value about your experience of 'church'? What do you wish others might experience?

4. After your work, REFLECT

How does the biblical narrative intersect with what you have learned? Where would Jesus hang out in your community?

If you think about the engaging personally with any one of the hopes or needs that you discovered, how do you feel? Energized? Fearful? Ready for someone else to do something? Unclear about your place? Be honest with one another about any tug at your heart or retreat in your soul.

How does your United Methodist theology — personal piety and social holiness — intersect with what you are learning and feeling?

What might inclusion look like given what you've learned? What might innovation look like given what you've learned? What might multiplication look like given what you've learned?

What tells you that you are ready to engage these practices? What tells you that you are not ready to engage?