



Living Local: Joining God

Introduction for Congregational Coaches

1. Overview of *Living Local: Joining God* for Congregations
2. Role of the Congregational Guiding Team
3. Commitment of Each Guiding Team Member
4. What Does a Congregation Coach Do?
5. Commitment of Coaches
6. Why is Coaching Important?
7. Tasks in Step 1: Listening to Learn—Guiding Team Activities
8. Resources

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Overview of *Living Local: Joining God* for Congregations

Key Question: How do we go on a shared journey in discerning what the Spirit is doing ahead of us in our neighborhoods and communities in order to join God in those places?

Time Table

Step 1: Listening to Learn

January – May 2017

- Congregations practice listening to God, one another and their neighborhoods.

Step 2: Reflecting and Discerning

June – September 2017

- Listening work is brought together from each congregation. Congregations are assisted in identifying and shaping a series of new behaviors.

Step 3: New Behaviors—Behaving Our Way into New Thinking

October 2017 – June 2018

- Engaging in new behaviors takes place across all the congregations.

Step 4 and 5: Reflecting and Deciding

July - December 2018

- Congregations:
 - Identify the learning developed through implementing the new behaviors
 - Identify what 'next step' actions are needed
 - Continue to identify new behaviors in which to engage

Role of the Congregation Guiding Team

The Guiding Team:

- Guides the work of *Living Local: Joining God* in their congregation
- Works with an external coach who assists them through every phase of the journey
- Updates its work and learning to the to the vestry of the church
- Meets with the Guiding Teams of other congregations from time to time to share stories of what they are doing and learning as well as receiving the training and resourcing they need for each part of the journey.

The Guiding Team is:

- Comprised of lay people but not clergy
- Primarily made up of lay leaders not currently serving in some other official capacity (i.e. vestry)
- Comprised of 4-7 people (depending on church size).
- Characterized by members who:
 - i. Have a deep, genuine commitment to the church and its people
 - ii. Support the leadership and this process.
 - iii. Have caught a vision for mission-shaped life of their church.
 - iv. Can realistically implement processes.
 - v. Have good relational skills
 - vi. Can effectively communicate across the church.
 - vii. Are aware of opportunities and barriers to change
 - viii. Are able to effectively bridge differences.

Commitment of Each Guiding Team Member

- Attend regular gatherings with other Guiding Teams engaged in *Living Local: Joining God*. These gatherings provide opportunity for Guiding Teams to learn from and support each other. They also provide ongoing training and resourcing to Guiding Teams as they move through the process.
- Attend meetings with members of the congregation Guiding Team. These meetings will be the space for planning the congregation's participation in each step of *Living Local: Joining God*. Frequency, time and place will be determined by the team.
- Recruit and train other participants in the congregation at each step in the process (i.e. Guiding Team members will train other people in the congregation how to Dwell in the Word, interview other church members, and walk their neighborhoods with a spiritual focus). Guiding Team members will also participate in practicing these activities.

What Does a Congregation Coach Do?

The role of the congregation coach is to accompany and support the Guiding Team as they guide the work of *Living Local: Joining God* in their congregation. The congregation coach will fulfill this role by learning, guiding, listening, encouraging and reflecting with their Guiding Team and the broader team of coaches. Coaches are supported through regular guided conversations, as a group, as well as on an individual basis as needed.

Learning

- Become familiar with the resources provided to the Guiding Teams.
- Develop collegial relationships with other coaches and be willing to learn from one another and alongside each other on the journey.

Guiding

- Guide the Guiding Team through process. The work of the congregation team is to work through the assigned tasks outlined in the *Living Local: Joining God* resources.
- Be flexible and aware of what the Guiding Team needs as time goes on
 - The Coach will tend to be more directive in the beginning, clarifying information, suggesting process and helping the group to form as a team and understand one another's gifts.
 - As time goes on, the Coach will often become less directive, inviting the Guiding Team to dig deeper, asking questions that elicit shifts in perspective and new understanding.
- Remain substantively neutral, without a stake in particular outcomes.
- Help the Guiding Team to assume responsibility for the process.
- Make sure that each meeting ends with clarification of assignments and next steps. Help the Guiding Team identify measures of accountability.

Listening

- Help the Guiding Team listen for how God might be leading them.

- Maintain awareness of content and process, and the participation and interaction of Guiding Team members.
- Assess when the Guiding Team is struggling and determine when additional support is needed.
- Focus on listening to others fully – both what is being said and what is not being said.
- Ask open questions in order to draw out someone and more clearly understand their perspectives and desires.
- Listen to get clarity about the “whole situation” rather than focusing on details.
- Use question-based conversation.

Encouraging

- Affirm that stepping into new behaviors can be difficult. Celebrate with the Guiding Team as they courageously try new behaviors and approaches.
- Support the Guiding Team as they engage *Dwelling in the Word* each time they gather.
- Create an atmosphere of trust and safety among the Guiding Team members. Accept disagreement, conflict, and evaluation as normal and natural.
- Engage people in finding their own solutions rather than providing counsel on what they should do.
- Create space for others to define options, recommendations, and drive solutions.
- Help people see the benefits of collaborating/partnering with others.

Reflecting

- Help the Guiding Team to reflect on what they are learning about themselves, their congregation and where God might be at work ahead of them.

Commitment of Coaches

- Attend all *Living Local: Joining God* Guiding Team training events.
- Participate in regular meetings with the Point Person supported by TMN (in person or via phone/video).
- At a minimum, connect monthly with the Guiding Team. This can be done in person, via email or via telephone.
- Be present in any meeting the Point Person has with the congregation (or Guiding Team) they are coaching.
- Complete work related to reviewing the learning congregations are doing through listening, conversations, experiments. This work will come in spurts as teams report in on their work in each phase of *Living Local: Joining God*.

Why is Coaching Important?

- A coach points out what Guiding Teams cannot or does not want to see. A coach can ask questions that no one else is asking. A coach has the unique advantage of being key “outside” and “inside” eyes to the congregation environment.
- A coach fosters a safe, compassionate confidential environment.
- A coach helps give perspective, provides a necessary reality check that helps Guiding Teams see the bigger picture before making decisions which may be unproductive.
- A coach helps improve efficiency and performance.
- A coach provides accountability.
- A coach aids in problem solving and processing conflict.
- A coach provides the key connection between congregation Guiding Teams and the Point Person.

Step 1: Listening to Learn—Guiding Team Activities

Coaches' Version

Dwelling in the Word

1. Identify two or three groups that meet at least monthly in the congregation where Dwelling in the Word can be introduced and practiced regularly over the course of the coming months.
2. Contact these groups and explain to them that you would like to meet to share the practice of Dwelling in the Word with them.
3. At the meeting:
 - a. Thank them for being willing to participate.
 - b. Provide them with Dwelling in the Word resources (How To and Text/Questions).
 - c. Practice Dwelling in the Word with them.
 - d. Describe what you want them to do: invite them to practice Dwelling in the Word as a group several times before the end of April.
 - e. Agree when to meet back to learn from their practicing Dwelling in the Word.
4. Include in your Summary Listening Report what the GT and the other groups are learning from engaging in Dwelling

Listening to One Another

1. GT recruits 5 to 7 persons from congregation to assist them—at least as many additional persons as there are members of the GT. GT members pair up with these additional persons to conduct the interviews.
2. GT identifies persons in your congregation that you feel would be willing to respond to an interview—suggest from 10 to 15 interviews. identify which GT pair will interview which person; and have them proceed to schedule their interviews.
3. At the interview:
 - a. Thank them for being willing to participate.
 - b. Explain that the members of the GT want to gather people's responses to some simple questions about the congregation.
 - c. State that the conviction of the GT that: "God has been working among us as a people for a long time and we want to listen to one another to hear the stories of how we have experienced God's work amongst us."

- d. Take notes of responses from each interview.
 - e. Finalize an interview worksheet and turn it into the GT.
4. GT gathers completed worksheets to process for the Summary Listening Report.

Planning Neighborhood Walks or Observation Locations

1. Recruit 5-7 congregation members (and more if persons are willing) to engage in Neighborhood Walks or Observation Locations exercise
2. Describe to people what they are going to do.
3. Provide copies of the worksheet “A Simple Neighborhood Walk or Observation Location”.
4. Share that this is about listening by simply walking around the neighborhood or observing people in a set location.
5. Have persons fill out a summary observation worksheet
6. Convene a follow up meeting with those who engaged in walks to share what they learn through their neighborhood walks or from their observation locations.
7. Capture this feedback and incorporate it into the GT Summary Listening Report

Planning Steps for Introducing Listening to Neighbors Interviews

1. Recruit 5-7 congregational members to join the Guiding Team (and more if person are willing) for interviewing your “neighbors.”
2. Provide people with an overview of what they are going to do. Suggest persons introduce themselves to perspective interviewees as follows:
 - There are a number of us out today who are trying to learn more about how people view and experience our community/neighborhood. We are part of an area church that is seeking to make deeper connections in relating to and serving this area. Would you be willing to take a few minutes to answer a few questions and offer your suggestions to help us?
3. Provide copies of the interview worksheet “Listening to Your Neighbor.”
4. Share that this is about interviewing people in your neighborhoods simply to listen. You may want to role play an interview to give people some ideas about how to draw out answers to the questions provided. Your coach can help you think through how to do this.
5. Conduct the interviews and prepare a summary of interview worksheet for each interview.
6. Convene a feedback session with those who conducted the interviews so they can share what they learned through listening to their neighbors.
7. GT incorporates this feedback into the Summary Listening Report.

Resources

Books:

People of the Way, Dwight Zscheile, CPI, 2012

The Agile Church, Dwight Zscheile, Morehouse, 2014

The Ministry of the Missional Church, Craig Van Gelder, Baker, 2007

Joining God, Remaking the Church, Changing the World, Alan J. Roxburgh, CPI, 2015

Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood, Alan J. Roxburgh, Baker, 2009

Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity, Clemens Sedmak, Orbis Books, 2002

Videos:

Joining God in the Local: What We Do (Alan Roxburgh)

<http://vimeo.com/79454163>

...and others on TMN's Vimeo Channel: <http://vimeo.com/rmn>