

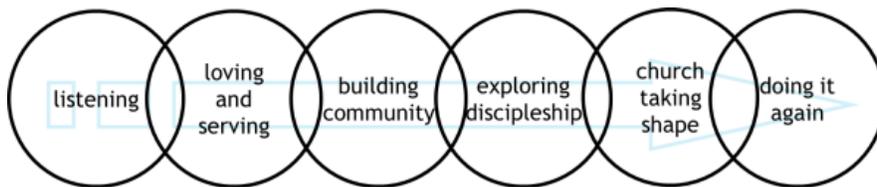


### Neighborhood Mapping – a First Step in Exegeting Your Community

*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **Go therefore and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. - Matthew 28:16-20*

As with the original disciples, the Church is sent into our neighborhoods and communities to be Christ’s hands and feet. In order for the church to do this well, it helps to “map the neighborhood.” Reading our community is the first step to partnering with the community and establishing relational trust.

Exegeting, or mapping, a community is how we go about understanding the needs and expectations that the people living in our community have. It is from this understanding that we can best impact our neighborhoods. Listening is the first step in creating a Fresh Expression of church. Underpinned by prayer, we want to listen to God’s spirit. Then, we listen to those we are called to serve.



### Mapping the Community

Mapping a community or neighborhood helps us see where we are called to go out, who we are called to serve, and what needs are not currently being met. We need to meaningfully walk around our neighborhood, taking the time to understand what people consider most important, what they fear, what they believe, and what they idolize.

## Creating the Map – Our Task Today!

At your tables, draw a simple map of your community, the place where you as a church are being sent. (We will use the word “neighborhood” in the context of either a specific neighborhood within the community, or the entire community – your choice)!

- Designate the boundaries of your neighborhood on the map – streets, rivers, mountains, open space, etc. How and why is the neighborhood growing?
- Draw your church building – is it in the center of the neighborhood, on the edge, or somewhere in between?
- Identify and map the local ministries and churches in the community. What ministries and social services are already taking place through these ministries and churches? Reflect on what the church map shows.
- What are the prime landmarks, and how do they shape the narrative of the neighborhood?
- Which institutions are caring for the poor, the sick, the marginalized? Place them on the map. (hospitals, clinics, senior centers, family service providers, etc.)
- What institutions provide emergency and government services in the neighborhood? (Police, fire, ambulance, city or town hall, county courthouse)
- What type of housing exists in the neighborhood? Indicate any known ethnic, social and economic composition, occupational patterns, religious affiliations, age of population, and problem groups.
- Where do people congregate and what activities do they engage in?
- How do people travel in, out and through the neighborhood?
- Who are the idea-people, the opinion-makers, the people of peace, in your neighborhood? Show on the map where they are located.
- Mark the places where you have existing relationships with people or organizations.
- Where might potential fresh expression partners or missional community exist?
- How will you work together for the goodwill of your community?

Take a picture of your map with your cell phone and be ready to pick up where you left off when you return home.

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When you return home, it will be time to move onto two more important listening tasks – mapping your church and conducting a prayer walk.

## Mapping Your Church

Map your local church. You will need to understand your church's history, its strengths, weaknesses, priorities, and members in order to determine how you are called to go out to serve the neighborhood.

- Take time to learn the gifts, strengths, and talents of the church members. Speak to the members. Ask them about the high/low points, the relationship with the community, strengths/weaknesses, and what they think the future is for the congregation and its relationship in the community. If you have already completed a timeline, dig it out and review.
- Conduct an APEST process to help you discern the gifts of the various members of your congregation. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers all have a role to play in creating Fresh Expressions of Church.

## Prayer Walk

Take a prayer walk around your neighborhood. When we do this, we are stepping into our authority as God's children to bless people and places in Jesus' name. This simple task is a great way to bring transformation to your local community by asking God to break in.

- Jesus sent his disciples out in pairs. Find a partner to prayer walk with.
- Using your neighborhood map as a reference, walk around to the landmarks and points of interest, problem areas noted, ministries provided.
- Talk to people as you walk – find out what the needs are in your local community by speaking to those in your neighborhood.
- The core of prayer walking is conversing with God; ask Him to show you what He sees; to know His heart for your community.
- As you walk in prayer, be aware of your surroundings: what you see, smell, hear and touch. Also be aware of what God is saying to you as you move around your community; if any Bible verses pop into your head or if you have any pictures, visions or words of knowledge.
- Be intentional about praying for God's blessings on what you see and feel.
- **Ask these questions –**
  - **Who is in your community that your church is currently not reaching?**
  - **For whom is your heart breaking?**
  - **With whom might God be inviting you to engage in life together?**

Come back to your church and talk about what you have learned, what you have felt, what you have heard God telling you. Pray about these questions and how the Holy Spirit is moving you to respond in your neighborhood. Now it's time to move to the next step in creating a Fresh Expression of Church – loving and serving.