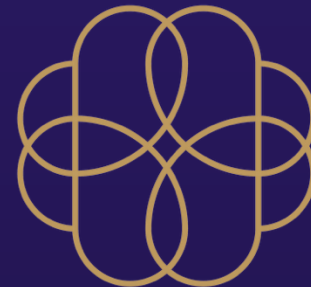


# Five Adaptive Muscles for Ministry Today

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**TEXAS  
METHODIST  
FOUNDATION**  
STEWARDING POTENTIAL

# Creating Brave Space

Adapted From Parker Palmer's  
Touchstones

**Extend and  
receive  
Welcome**

**Choose  
questions over  
answers**

**Trust and learn  
from silence**

**Be present as  
fully as  
possible**

**When it gets  
rough, turn to  
wonder**

**Observe deep  
confidentiality**

**Speak your truth  
in ways that  
respect other  
people's truth**

**Attend to your  
own inner  
teacher**

**Trust the  
process**





***The landscape  
has shifted***

Affiliation → *Individualism*

Convergence → *Divergence*

“We” Culture → *“I” Culture*

Communication

Experience  
(Broadcast) → Experience  
(Interactive)

# The Current Gap



**Decline in Affiliation**  
**Rise in Spirituality**

## *Some numbers...*

**70 %**

of U.S. adults said they  
belonged to a  
religious institution



**1999**

In 2020, that number  
was down to

**47 %**



**2020**

**Today...**

**37%**



US Adults report membership in a congregation (church, synagogue or mosque)

# The Current Gap



**Decline in Affiliation**  
**Rise in Spirituality**

# The Mixed Ecology



# The Mixed Ecology of Church

- Attractional-Model Churches
  - Maintenance Churches
- Missional-model Churches
- Innovative Faith Communities
- Faith-based Not-for-Profits
- SBNR Meaning-Making Communities



Our rational decision-making models may be too limiting for this season. We need processes that engage the Holy Spirit as a decision partner, because what needs to happen next may be larger than the limits of human imaginings. We need to be led by the future itself. Relying on past patterns of success will not serve us well.

Susan Beaumont

# Three Types of Leadership Conversations

- Maintenance Conversations
- Preferential Conversations
- Missional Conversations



# Five Muscles for a Thriving Congregation

- Tending Grief
- Discerning Purpose
- Neighboring
- Sharing Power
- Igniting Imagination

“You ever been in a church council meeting when someone is *really* angry about something?

**There is grief there.  
You just have to look for it.”**

**-Dr. Paula Dobbs Wiggins**

# Categories of Loss in the Church

- Changes in UMC / disaffiliations
- Change of leadership / pastors / Bishops
- Bereavement from the passing of legacy leaders
- Loss of a certain view of the future
- Loss of self-esteem / loss of relevancy
- Loss of security and certainty
- Loss of long-term traditions / programs
- Loss related to Covid / politics of the past few years



# My Experience





**The New  
Beginning**

**The Neutral Zone**

**Ending, Losing,  
Letting Go**

# Psalm 6

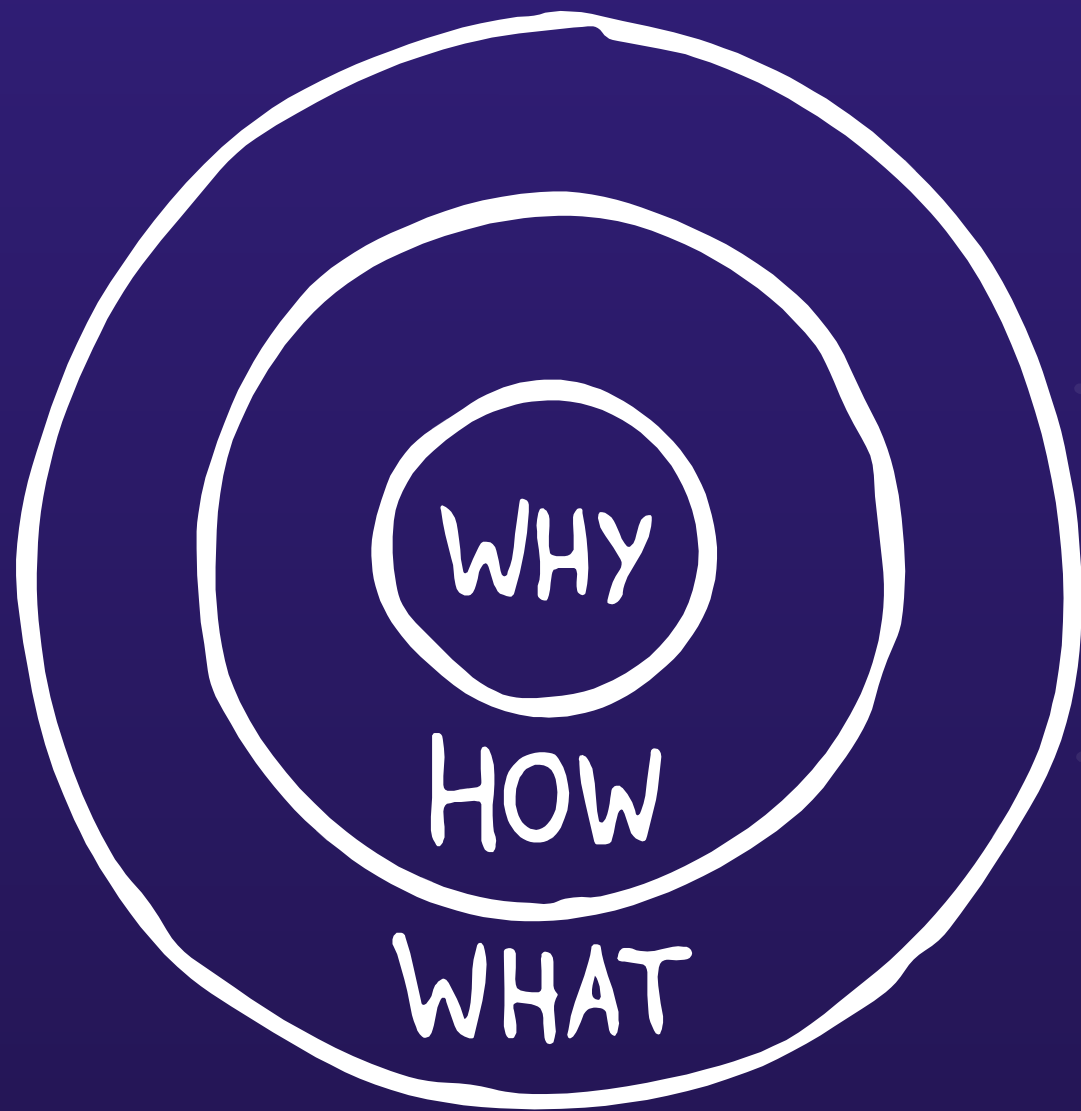
- <sup>6</sup> I am weary with my moaning;  
every night I flood my bed with tears;  
I drench my couch with my weeping.
- <sup>7</sup> My eyes waste away because of grief;  
they grow weak because of all my foes.
- <sup>8</sup> Depart from me, all you workers of evil,  
for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping.
- <sup>9</sup> The Lord has heard my supplication;  
the Lord accepts my prayer.

# Discussion Questions

- What griefs are you are carrying as a congregation?
- How might you create space for your congregation to name and share the grief they are carrying?

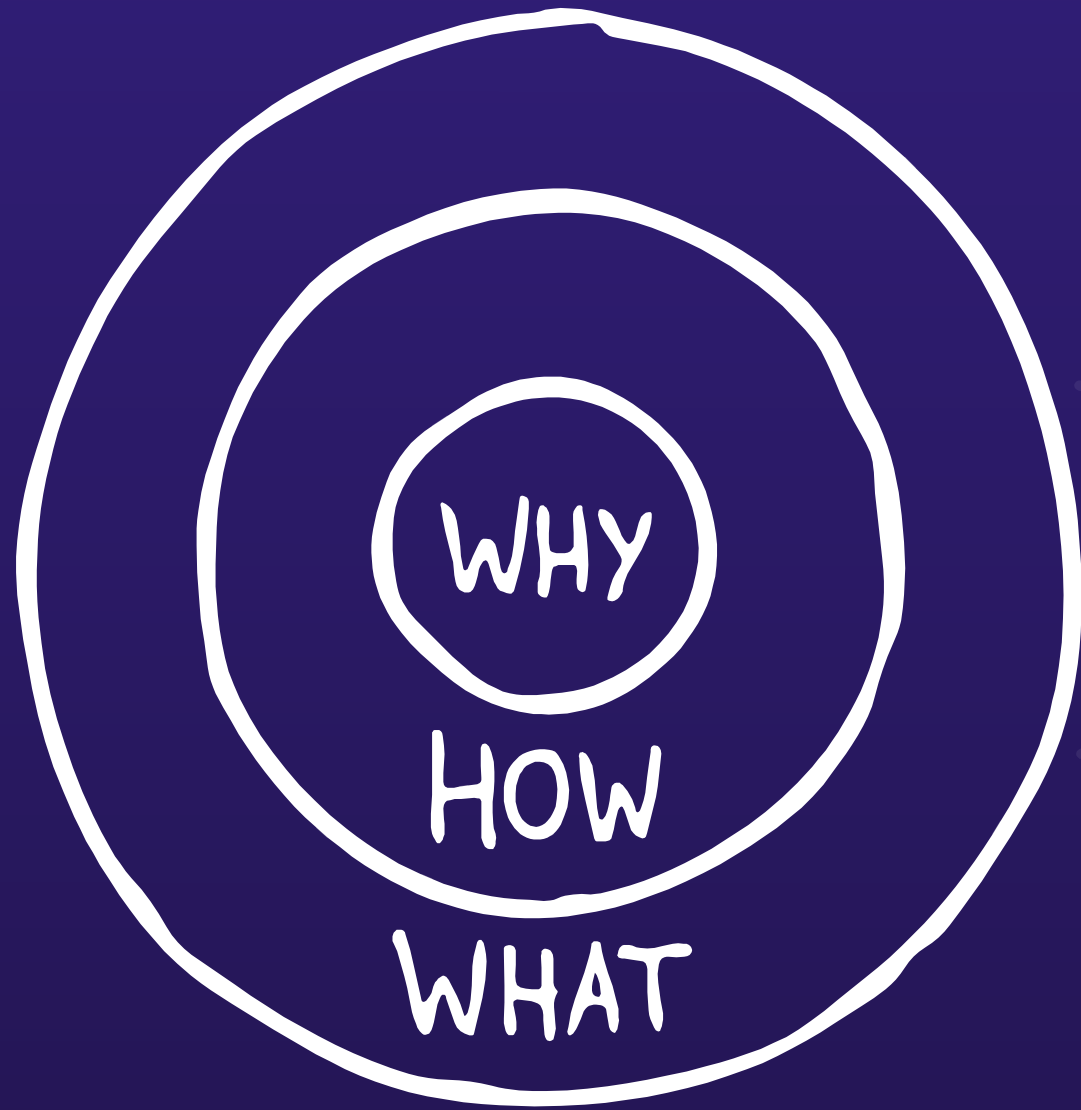


# Discerning Purpose



“Most church boats don’t like to be rocked; they prefer to lie at anchor rather than go places in stormy seas. But that’s because we Christians view the Church as the object of our love instead of the subject and instrument of God’s.

**–William Sloan Coffin**





GOD'S  
DREAMS

HOLY  
SPIRIT

CHURCH



**What is the clear and specific dream of God for your context?**

**What is the clear, proximate outcome needed to move one more step closer to that dream?**



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# Discerning Purpose

- What is God doing among us? In our community?
- What new voices do we hear? New questions?
- What are the promptings, and warnings, of the Holy Spirit we are receiving now?”

# How do we know when we are exercising the muscle of Discerning Purpose?

- We're attentive to God--not just making decisions / problem solving.
- We are asking: "Is this what God is calling us to do?"
- We're not bending towards people's preferences.
  - Not asking: "Is this going to make people happy / unhappy?"
- We are free to respond to the call.
  - We've let go of some things so we can be free.
- We are living out of our Core Values.



**Neighboring**

## PART ONE



# OUT AND ABOUT

On your own or in pairs go on a walk around your home, school, church or place of work for 30-60 minutes. Fill out the top part of this sheet simply through observation

Something smells good:

\_\_\_\_\_

A facility used well:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Somewhere safe:

\_\_\_\_\_

Something beautiful:

\_\_\_\_\_

Somewhere people are gathering and happy:

\_\_\_\_\_

Something unique:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Something stinks:

\_\_\_\_\_

A place people should be, but are not:

\_\_\_\_\_

Somewhere unsafe:

\_\_\_\_\_

Something ugly:

\_\_\_\_\_

A place people are gathering and creating mischief:

\_\_\_\_\_

Something you'd miss if you didn't have:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## PART TWO



# CONVERSATIONS WITH LOCALS

Have at least 3 conversations, maybe even with just someone you pass as you are out on your walk. Ask them what they consider the biggest assets or problems in the neighborhood or city. Use the boxes to capture your notes.

### THEIR BIGGEST ASSETS:

### THEIR BIGGEST PROBLEMS:

## Discussion Questions

- What can we learn about 'neighboring' from the story of Galveston Central?
- Which muscles (Tending Grief, Discerning Purpose, Neighboring, Sharing Power, Igniting Imagination) were being exercised?

# Neighboring

- Who is our neighbor now? Who do we need to be learning from in our neighborhood or community?
- What barriers does our church have that limit mutual partnerships and relationships in our community?
- How does our church nurture and encourage friendships inside and outside the church?



# Igniting Imagination

# The Three Characteristics of Imaginative Gridlock

- The Treadmill Effect
- A Focus on Answers
- The Polarization of False Dichotomies (Either / Or Thinking)

# Discussion Questions

- Which characteristic of Imaginative Gridlock do you get caught in?
- Which do you see most present in your congregation right now?

## **Imaginative Gridlock**

The Treadmill Effect

A Focus on Answers

The Polarization of False Dichotomies

# How Might We's: turn ideas, problems, or statements into questions for ideation

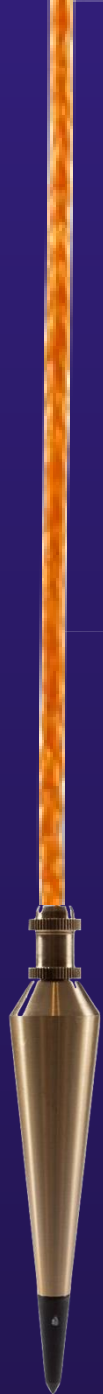
- **Statement:**  
“We need to get people into our building.”
- **HMW:**  
“How might we become a meaningful presence beyond our building?” or
- “What if our building existed primarily for our neighbors—how might we use it differently?”

## Write some How Might We's

- “We can’t get people to come to church anymore.”
- “It’s always the same few people doing everything.”
- “Young people just aren’t interested.”
- “We have this big building we barely use.”
- “We don’t have enough money to try new things.”
- “People in our neighborhood don’t even know we’re here.”

---

- Pick one statement. Your task is to rewrite it as a ‘How Might We’ question.
- Try to point it **toward your neighborhood, not just your church**



<b>Silicon Valley</b>	<b>Holy Innovation</b>
Great ideas	<i>Great love</i>
Bigger-faster-stronger	<i>Smaller-slower-more vulnerable</i>
New	<i>Upside-down</i>
Disruptive innovation	<i>Sacrificial love</i>

# Five Muscles for a Thriving Congregation

- Tending Grief
  - Discerning Purpose
  - Neighboring
  - Sharing Power
  - Igniting Imagination
- Which muscle(s) feels most relevant for your congregation right now?
  - What is one step you might take towards exercising that muscle?

# **Matthew 9-10**

**from the Message paraphrase**