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Reimagining the Church's New Member Experience Through Mutual Storytelling

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

REIMAGINING THE CHURCH'S NEW MEMBER EXPERIENCE THROUGH MUTUAL STORYTELLING



IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

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PROJECT FACULTY:

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PORTLAND, OREGON

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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has been approved by
the Evaluation Committee on March 15, 2023
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics, Church, and Culture.

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Dedication

To Tim, Charli, and Eli. Our story is my favorite.

And to everyone who shared part of your story, allowing it to become part of mine, this is for you.

May we all become better storytellers, better question askers, and better able to weave our stories together.

Acknowledgments

Like any good story, the narrative of this project had many characters who carried it along. My friends and family are fantastic storytellers and I'm honored that they trust me with the stories of their lives. My life motto has long been, "good times or good stories," and I am continually grateful for the people who ensure my life is filled with both.

To my peer group, mentors, and cohort members, your generosity in sharing your experiences, thoughts, and stories has forever changed my life. Special thanks to Julie, Stacey, Donna, and Mindy for adding laughs and sanity checks along the way. My story is better because of each of you.

I am beyond thankful for the support of my parents, Chuck and Barbara Culver, and my in-laws, Kevin and Meg Holland, each of whom provided encouragement, personal stories, and childcare, all of which were vital.

Charli and Eli, your stories will always be the ones in which I'm most proud of having a supporting role. Thank you both for celebrating with me, leaving drawings in my notebooks to help cheer me on, and reminding me to take time to build, draw, and play with you, because that is how stories are first understood and told.

And finally, Tim. Not only could I not have done this without you, I would not have wanted to. You were my editor, my web designer, my sounding board, and constant encourager. Thank you for your dedication to me and our family as we've lived this chapter. You are my favorite, and I am so grateful that we're writing this life story together.

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Glossary

Assimilation. A standard definition of assimilation is *the process of receiving new facts or of responding to new situations in conformity with what is already available to consciousness*.¹ In many church spaces the definition more closely resembles, *a process whereby we transform our programs, services, and events into connection points to foster human interactions that become the genesis of authentic community*.² In this project, it is most frequently used as shorthand for *look and think like us*.

Community Integration Program. This umbrella term is used to refer holistically to church welcome orientations, new member classes, assimilation programs, and all other methods used to help a church visitor become a church member.

Cultural Christianity. Church or faith affiliation primarily for social capital.

Forgotten Middle. Sometimes referred to as the *missing middle*, this term refers to those whose needs are often missed because they do not show the same level of promise as those in the exceptional group, nor are they in the group requiring the most assistance. The forgotten middle effect can be seen across sectors and has been shown to be positively impacted by initiatives that recognize the group's specific needs.

Gospel Distortions. Practices claimed to be rooted in faith that are instead culturally driven misinterpretations. The impact becomes magnified when cultural distortions are adopted by the local church as a marker for belonging. These are often tied to assimilation practices.

¹ "Assimilation," Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster), accessed February 18, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/assimilation>.

² Dave Bair and Steve Caton, *The Assimilation Engine: Four Processes That Drive How People Connect with Your Church* (Church Community Builder, Inc, 2013), https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/857538/CCB/_docs/eBooks/the-assimilation-engine.pdf, 3.

Research Method

This Doctoral Project utilized a blended research and design methodology called 'Collaborative Design for Ministry and Nonprofit Contexts'. In Collaborative Design, practitioners work with stakeholder representatives to address a Need, Problem, or Opportunity (NPO) in their context. Using a combination of bibliographic resources, local knowledge derived from stakeholder Workshops, and an iterative process of continuous adjustment using 'just enough' feedback information at each juncture of development, practitioners produce an application-oriented Project that seeks to effect Christ-centered change.

Abstract

Most churches are great at welcoming visitors and have worked hard to develop their discipleship pipeline, but between these two stages where most churches focus and excel there is an experiential gap for new members. Looking into this gap more deeply, I discovered that *despite guided assimilation processes, new church members feel abandoned when moved immediately to self-directed engagement. Providing for their unique needs increases their sense of belonging and commitment.*

Through conversations with church leaders, members, and those seeking to find church community, I noticed that this liminal period was the turning point in most of their stories, too often leading to frustration for church leaders and disappointed longing for those seeking a church home. Having experience as both a church leader seeking to address this experiential gap through small groups and hospitality efforts and a new church member desiring to become rooted and engaged, yet struggling to do so despite following all the steps my new church laid out, I recognized the feelings expressed by all parties because they were part of my story.

To address this, I developed the 8-session experience, *Known*. Using a story-based, question-driven strategy designed to build committed, invested relationships between new members and the church, *Known* provides a framework helping both the church and new members tell the story of their history, mission, vision, values, community, and culture to develop a more holistic understanding of one another and how their individual stories are, together, part of God's story. The [BeKnown.Church](#) website hosts the full suite of *Known* resources, designed to aid the local church through the implementation, launch, and running of a *Known* experience. Questions transform us and stories connect us. *Known* combines these truths to help build belonging and commitment between churches and their new members.

Introduction

Most churches are great at welcoming visitors and have worked hard to develop their discipleship pipeline, but between these two stages where most churches focus and excel there is an experiential gap for new members. Looking into this gap more deeply, I discovered my NPO: *despite guided assimilation processes, new church members feel abandoned when moved immediately to self-directed engagement. Providing for their unique needs increases their sense of belonging and commitment.* Through conversations with church leaders, members, and those seeking to find church community, I noticed that this liminal period was the turning point in most of their stories, too often leading to frustration for church leaders and disappointed longing for those seeking a church home. To address this, I developed the 8-session experience, *Known*. Using a story-based, question-driven strategy designed to build committed, invested relationships between new members and the church, *Known* provides a framework helping both the church and new members tell their story to develop a more holistic understanding of one another and how their individual stories are, together, part of God's story. The [BeKnown.Church](https://www.beknownchurch.com) website hosts the full suite of *Known* resources, designed to aid the local church through the implementation, launch, and running of a *Known* experience.

Two years before I began this program, I left my Small Groups Pastor position at a non-denominational megachurch in an urban area to move, jobless, with my family to a suburban area. Following our move, we struggled to become engaged in a local church, though not for lack of trying. We followed all the recommendations and took initiative, but never truly felt like part of our new community. When I voiced my concerns to church leaders, they expressed frustration because they had made it easy for me; clearly I was doing something wrong, they said. I understood their perspective because I had previously led similar pastoral conversations with people struggling to engage in our church community. But now I was living it and experiencing how difficult it is to bridge the church welcome experience with becoming an engaged part of the community.

Since beginning the program, I have become rooted in a local church serving on their teaching and leadership teams and have provided ministry consulting to various churches, all of which have provided me with additional opportunities to see that my experience was a trend. In broad terms, many churches focus and excel in welcoming visitors and provide thoughtful discipleship opportunities for their members, but I experienced the gap for new members who fall between the two focus areas. Exploring this gap—how it happens, why it happens, who is impacted, and what could happen if it was addressed—became the driver of my research.

Discovery

Going into the Discovery Workshop, I assumed my difficulty finding belonging was rooted in the Cultural Christianity in my new town. I invited a group of six people (discipleship, small group, and spiritual directors, two teachers, and a therapist) who spanned two continents, five states, and represented various racial, cultural, and generational groups to discuss a working statement I shared beforehand: *Pervasive Cultural Christianity—affiliation primarily for social capital—reduces*

opportunities for authentic relationship with others and increases the felt need for spiritual connection to God typically found in spiritual formation. What quickly became apparent was that *Cultural Christianity* is just a single, regionally specific version of the broader impact of gospel distortions.

By zooming out to consider the larger impact of *gospel distortions*, our discussion revealed that the specific expressions were less important than the problematic root driver: the need for assimilation. Specifically, when assimilation—look and think like us—becomes the church's *de facto* goal, relationships and discipleship suffer. Each stakeholder had a story about this revealing the ubiquity of the issue.

My one-on-one interviews confirmed much of what the workshop stakeholders discussed, but I was surprised that following general agreement, each person I interviewed expressed a slightly different understanding of *assimilation*. This highlighted the varying ways the word and practice are viewed and used in the church context, and led to conversation about the individual and systemic implications, suggesting the importance of looking into both.

The themes that emerged were: the universal experience of disappointment when expectations of genuine relationship in the church are instead met with attempts at assimilation; concern over assimilation becoming the church's go-to answer for relationship building and sustainment; and how wide-reaching assimilation efforts are in many churches despite leadership seeing that controlled engagement efforts often do not, in practice, lead to genuine relationships. The church tells people to engage in the assimilation process because that is where they'll find relationships and discipleship opportunities, but the metric-driven focus is misaligned with the implied relational outcome, leading to disappointment, disengagement, and missed opportunities for genuine relationships and discipleship.

After discovering the near universal problems with assimilation and their relationship to engagement metrics and misaligned expectations, I knew I needed to look deeper. Although the church's efforts have skewed toward assimilation, I continue to believe they are rooted in a sincere desire for hospitality. Because of this, my research focused on historical hospitality practices in the church and learning how they have largely morphed into assimilation-based prescriptive approaches derived from the business world. Based on my personal and anecdotal experience I was curious about the impact of these new approaches on belonging and building rooted community.

Design

I began by looking at hospitality practices and why, in practice, so many churches used prescriptive assimilation programs to address it. Though I zeroed in on the impact of these practices on new members, I kept sensing there was a deeper need under the felt need of belonging. Applying business practices to the church was one cause I researched, raising the question why the church was turning to business to develop best practices in the first place. My research revealed several historical trends that aided this shift, but anecdotally I was noticing something more—churches were

turning elsewhere for guidance because they did not recognize the importance of their contextually specific story. Consequentially, they did not tell their stories because they did not know they should, or they did not know how. The felt need of bridging the gap for new members remained my primary focus, but I sought to develop something that could simultaneously raise awareness of the deeper, underlying need of recognizing the need for knowing and sharing contextual stories.

This was front of mind as I went into the Design Workshop in the second year when my NPO had evolved to: *Provide an alternative approach to communicate belonging to newcomers, turning from metric-based prescribed assimilation to continual, mutually responsive growth and investment*. I knew I wanted to reimagine the approach churches use to communicate belonging to, and encourage engagement from, newcomers. I also wanted to engage a question-based framework for evaluating their current models. One challenge I anticipated was that my NPO addresses unintended side effects of the current sincere methods, requiring the scope to include raising awareness of the role assimilation models play in the disconnect between expectations and results for both the church and the newcomers.

The workshop and following interviews were helpful, though not as I anticipated. Instead of helping me brainstorm concepts, my conversations reiterated that people are quick to assume their positive experiences are universal while negative experiences are easily explained away, illustrating the importance of finding and communicating the common experiences first, and reminded me that people who lead hospitality efforts in their churches do so with good intentions, so I need to broach the issues I have uncovered gently. These truths informed my three subsequent concept pitches: creating a newcomer-bridge diagnostic tool for churches to evaluate their current methods, developing a strategic workshop for church staff members who manage or influence hospitality practices at their church with the goal of reimaging their welcome model in a way that centered reciprocal growth and investment, and writing an eight-week small group study to be used in lieu of current assimilation models.

Following the conversations I did further research on story-as-marketing, change management, the *forgotten middle* phenomenon, and mutuality, which further informed my project. My concepts morphed into two prototypes: *Mind the Gap* book that explores the causes and impact of churches ignoring the forgotten middle of their congregation, and the *Known* Small Group Study curriculum to be used in place of current assimilation programs. Feedback for both prototypes was positive and indicated a hybrid approach should emerge as my MVP. I initially assumed the hybrid would center around the book because it offered data and a research-driven theoretical foundation and include a condensed version of the study so it could be put into practice. As I moved forward with my assumed MVP, however, I quickly realized I did not want to convince people a problem existed, I wanted to help those who already realized it did, so *Known*, in a slightly different shape, became the center.

Delivery

PROJECT SCOPE

My project scope can be divided into two categories: content creation and website construction. The content is an 8-session community integration small group study, *Known*, and supporting resources including a leader guide, implementation guide, and on-demand training videos. The website, BeKnown.Church, was developed as the hub for the *Known* suite of resources, and construction focused on website layout and design, accessibility, and finding the best platforms to support digital training, user registration data, and other content elements. I also developed a marketing strategy for training and consultation services that are part of my long-term goals with the project.

BENCHMARKS

I used five benchmarks to measure the quality and success of my project. The quality measure used the Ahrefs³ health score and the success measures are all based on a user experience survey completed by stakeholders who reviewed a draft version of *Known*.

- Receive an Ahrefs health score of 100% for the website, indicating an accessible, user-friendly site.
- A majority of surveyed participants of the user experience survey rate their experience as highly satisfied as indicated by a response of 4 or 5 out of 5 on a Likert scale.
- At least 80% of surveyed participants of the user experience survey indicate that they would refer *Known* resources to a friend.
- At least 50% of church leaders reviewing an abbreviated *Known* study express interest in piloting *Known* at their church.
- 3-5 ministry leaders overseeing community integration programs in their church express interest in using the resources they reviewed.

FEEDBACK

I planned to gather feedback on the various, individual elements of the project instead of holistically, providing one section of the content portions of the project—small group study outline, on-demand training outlines, or question-based intake form—and mockups of the website layout to stakeholders. I also planned to ask several church leaders to participate in an abbreviated version of the study, but the time required for that feedback method made it untenable. Instead, I sent all pieces to each stakeholder for review which allowed for more comprehensive feedback but failed

³ Ahrefs is an online tool used for website audits and optimization. The health score is a reflection of error free pages on the site.

to provide insight into a participant experience I would have received had a shortened version of the experience been executed.

Each stakeholder completed a user experience survey that asked their overall impression, the likelihood of sharing this resource with others, and their interest in piloting *Known* or using the resources. I also met one-on-one with several additional reviewers who provided thorough feedback.

LONG-TERM OBJECTIVES

My future goals for *Known* are centered on marketing the current resources and using *Known* as a top-of-funnel tool to build a ministry consulting business. My overall marketing strategy is based on social media marketing and word-of-mouth sharing between pastors. My initial marketing plans include developing an automated email campaign for all *Known* registrants to help build a customer base and assisting churches who are piloting *Known*. I also plan to create additional resources for *Known* and make the current resources even more user friendly. The ministry consulting business will provide support for churches implementing *Known*, team training and alignment support, strategic planning, and support for community building, integration, and small group development.

Evaluation of Experience

Throughout this project I was met with self-imposed hurdles. My first-year research focused on the harm prescriptive, one-size-fits-all approaches have had on hospitality practices in churches. Because of this, the answer to my NPO could not be a prescriptive, one-size-fits-all approach. Further, prescriptive assimilation models are adopted largely because of their easy-to-replicate programmatic structures, so if I want to develop a viable alternative approach, I knew I needed a framework that celebrated the unique context of each church and church member yet was standardized enough to be universally applicable. Noting that many churches struggled with telling their story, I focused my second-year research on storytelling which also provided the answer to my predicament. Stories are personal, stories build relationships, and storytelling by its very nature is contextual. Everyone has a story, but many need help in knowing how to tell it. Discerning how to help churches and their members tell their unique stories as they grow into relationship with a shared story is how *Known* was born.

I also discovered during my workshops and interviews that though my NPO was glaring to me, some practitioners struggled to see how their sincere efforts could be part of the problem. I considered creating something that helped churches recognize the issue, but quickly discovered how ineffective it was to try to raise awareness of a problem, diagnose the problem, and solve a problem in a single tool. It moves from ineffective to nearly impossible when the first step is convincing church leaders the problem exists. I knew I needed to lean into addressing a felt need for churches, almost approaching my NPO sideways, to allow me to address both the felt and underlying issues. My hope is that in time I will be able to directly address the underlying issue through my consulting work.

Next Steps

The continued development of my project will initially focus on three elements: building out current resources, marketing *Known*, and establishing a ministry consulting business using *Known* as top-of-funnel marketing. *Known* is a fully realized program that I can now focus on improving through an iterative approach driven by user feedback. Three churches have expressed interest in piloting it, with two of the experiences already tentatively scheduled. Their feedback will help drive future development. They will also, hopefully, support my word-of-mouth-driven marketing.

During the design phase, the secondary issue I discovered informed my project design, but I intend to turn my attention and ministry consulting focus to it more fully. Churches who aren't clear on their story fail to engage new members holistically, instead settling for sharing surface-level details instead of explaining their *why*. Moving forward, I would like to partner with churches to help them discover, and learn how to share, their *why*, using a similar story-based, question-driven approach developed for *Known*.

Reflection

To use an overworked metaphor, this project often felt like peeling away layers of an onion. What started as a hunch about the impact of Cultural Christianity uncovered widespread gospel distortions. This led to questions about assimilation, hospitality, and the cultural impact of business practices imposed on churches, all of which ultimately led me to rediscover the beauty and power of story. The throughline seems preordained because my personal journey over the same time followed a similar trajectory. My family struggled to connect to a local church due in part to the impact of Cultural Christianity that was a misapplication of gospel living. I initially struggled to find my footing and my voice in this program. I began asking deeper questions and found others who were asking similar ones. I was grateful for the community, because each time we asked questions that seemingly peeled away another level of protection, what we came to discover was that raw and real stories were healing. As part of this question asking, my family was invited into a beautiful church community that told us from the beginning that their story would change because we were now part of it. That conviction was a turning point in my family's life and in my project. I want to live in a way that my story is changed because of how I'm engaging my community, and I want to be better at recognizing how each of the chapters is part of the grand story God is continuing to write.

The onion peeling, iterative approach to the project also provided a new way for me to think about my context. Two years before starting this program I oversaw a church staff team across eight campuses, led over 500 volunteers, and guided a local group of pastors through personal and ministry development. Following my family's move, when I started the program I was overseeing the care of my two kids, leading a small group of seven people, and felt like my world was growing more and more insular. I was not discouraged by decreased influence or position, but it felt like my story had ended and I was becoming just a supporting character in other people's stories. This program was a new chapter that breathed fresh creativity and life into my story, but also expanded my understanding of the beauty of being a supporting character.

My dreams for *Known* go far beyond the content. I pray that *Known* will help connect people to into their local church community. I pray that *Known* will be a springboard for churches to reimagine what their impact can be within their context. I pray that *Known* reminds people that our uniqueness reflects the imago Dei, not something that needs to be merged with others to fit in. I pray that *Known* encourages a culture of good question askers and even better listeners. And I pray that *Known* will help others rediscover their story as it has helped me rediscover my own.

Doctoral Project

Introduction

Known is an 8-session story-based, question-driven experience designed to build mutually committed relationships between the local church and new members by addressing the experiential gap that exists for new members between visitor welcome approaches and established discipleship programming. Intended to replace existing integration programs, the BeKnown.Church website houses a full suite of resources to help churches launch their customized *Known* experience.

My project is presented as a compilation of screenshots to illustrate the resources available on BeKnown.Church as they would be experienced by both a participant and church leader navigating the website. There is additional focus on the resources available to aid implementing *Known*, the complete *Known* participant guide and church script builder, and representative samples of the on-demand training and supporting resources.

Presentation of Project

Homepage Experience

Users of BeKnown.Church, the website housing the full suite of *Known* resources, will first see the homepage. The homepage highlights the ethos of *Known*, the benefits of a story-based approach, and a brief overview of how *Known* works. Designed to be user-friendly, all site navigation options are available from the homepage. Figures 1-5 represent the full homepage user experience on <https://beknown.church>.

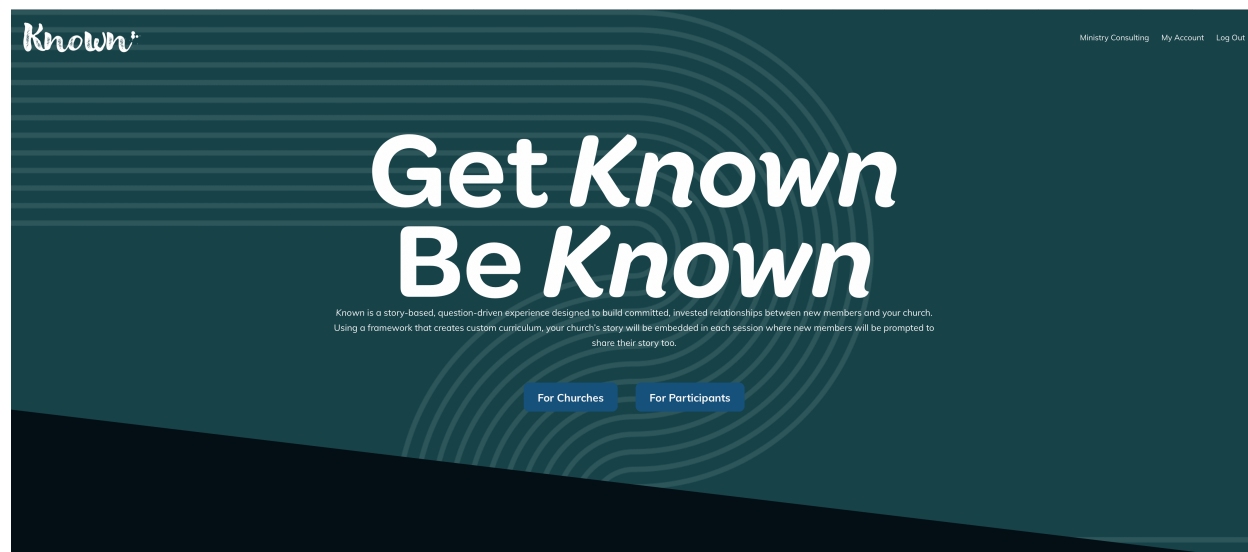


FIGURE 1: KNOWN HOMEPAGE WITH SITE NAVIGATION OPTIONS



FIGURE 2: KNOWN HOMEPAGE OUTLINING PROGRAM BENEFITS



**FIGURE 3: KNOWN HOMEPAGE WITH VIDEO INTRODUCTION TO KNOWN
(TRANSCRIPT AVAILABLE IN THE APPENDIX)**

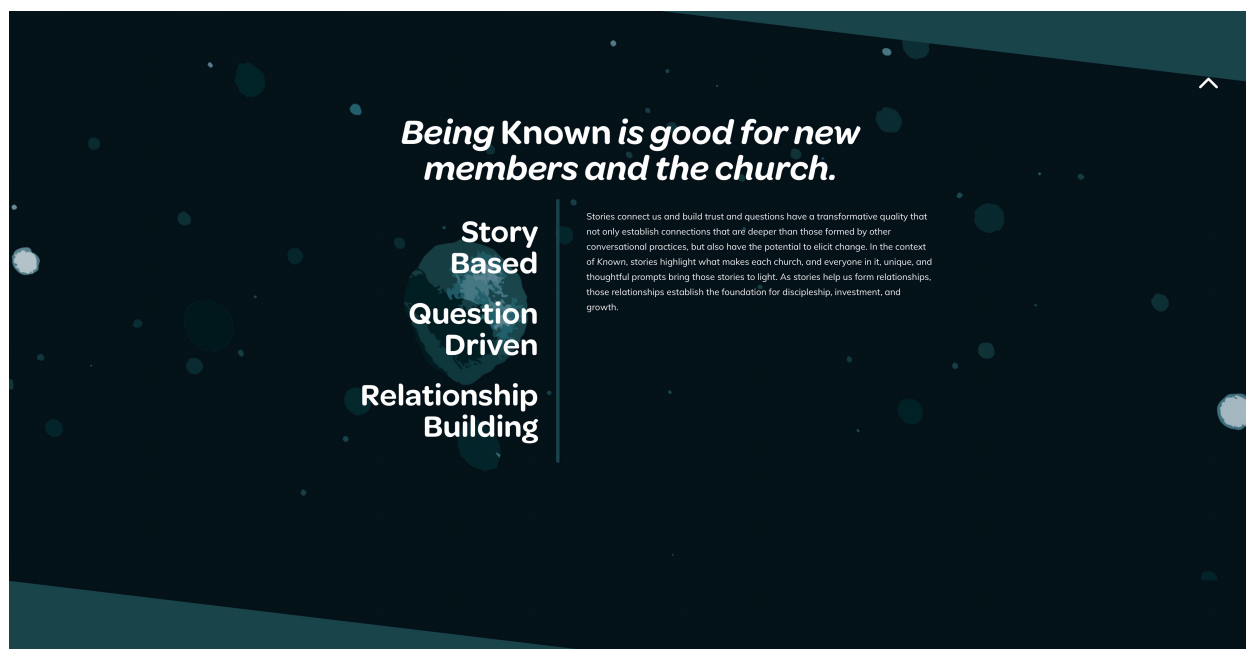


FIGURE 4: KNOWN HOMEPAGE WITH EXPLANATION OF THE STORY-BASED, QUESTION-DRIVEN APPROACH

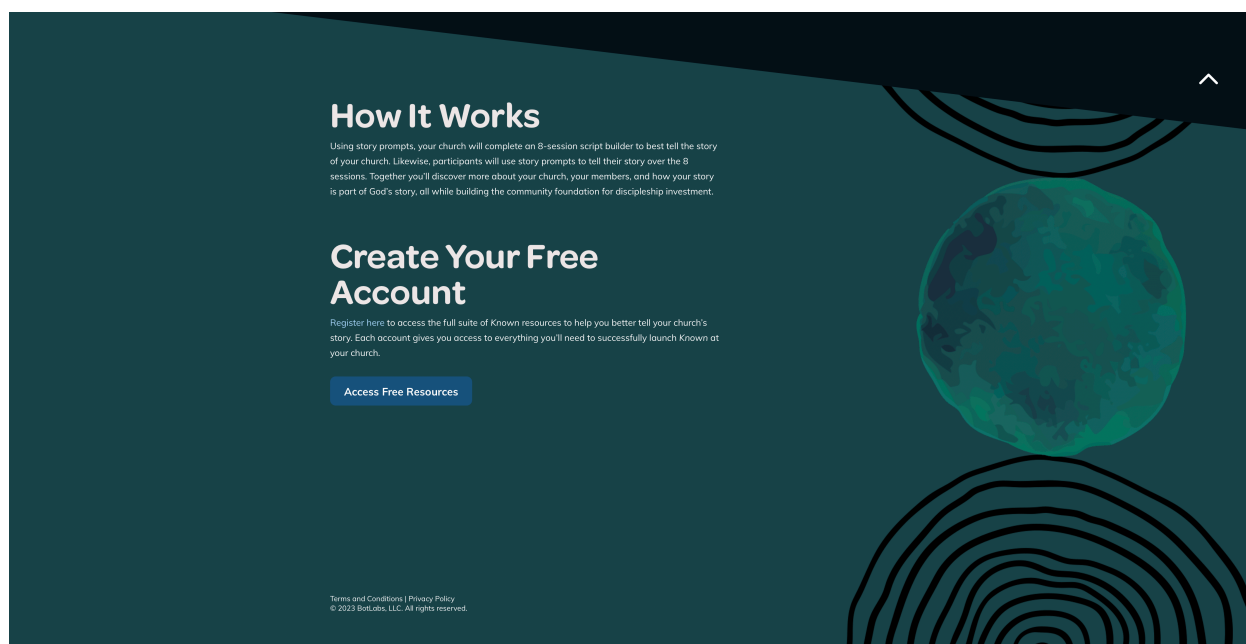


FIGURE 5: KNOWN HOMEPAGE WITH PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND LINK TO USER ACCOUNT REGISTRATION

Participant Experience

Known was designed for the local church and primarily with church leaders in mind, but at its heart, *Known* provides a platform for new members and their stories to become an integral part of the church they are joining. Because of this, most resources for the initial project launch were developed to support the church as they implement, launch, and run *Known*, but the single most robust resource is for participants.

Known participant users will navigate from the *Known* homepage using the “For Participants” button to <https://beknown.church/known/participants/>. The participant user experience is illustrated in figures 6 and 7.

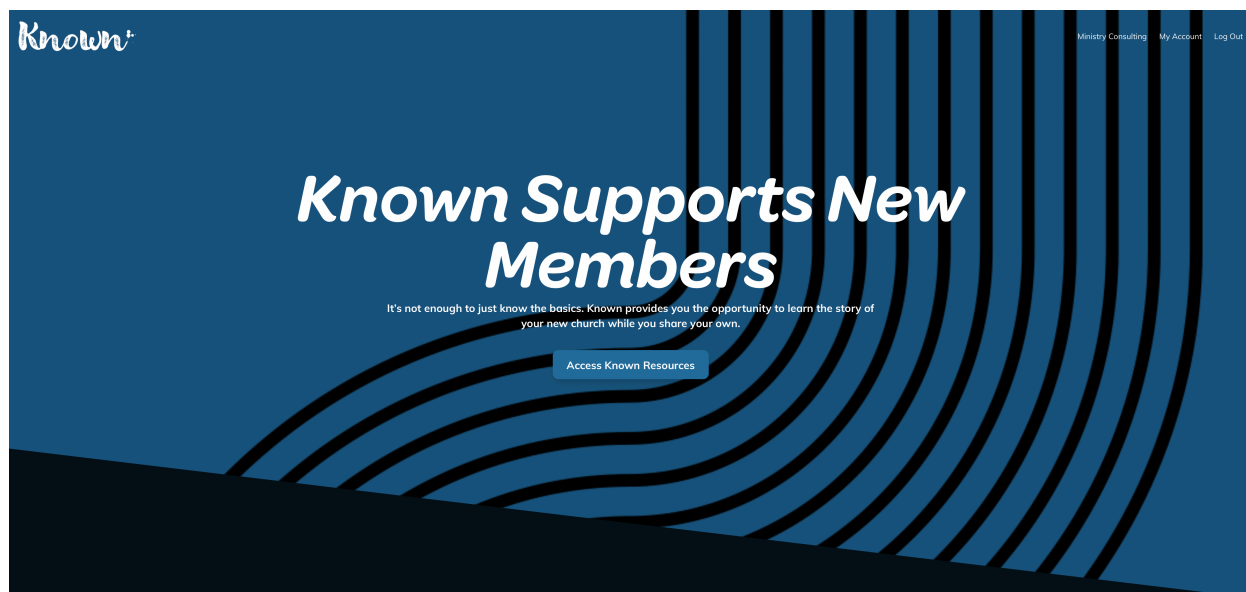


FIGURE 6: KNOWN PARTICIPANT LANDING PAGE



Register to be *Known*

Register here to access the Tell Your Story: Story-Based, Question-Driven Prompts for Known participants. This guide will help you better tell your story about where you've been, who you are now, and what you hope to do in the future. It will help you to be Known.

Please select an option

☐ I am located outside the United States

Please select an option

[Next](#)

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FIGURE 7: KNOWN PARTICIPANT ACCOUNT REGISTRATION WITH WHY STORYTELLING VIDEO LINK (TRANSCRIPT AVAILABLE IN THE APPENDIX)

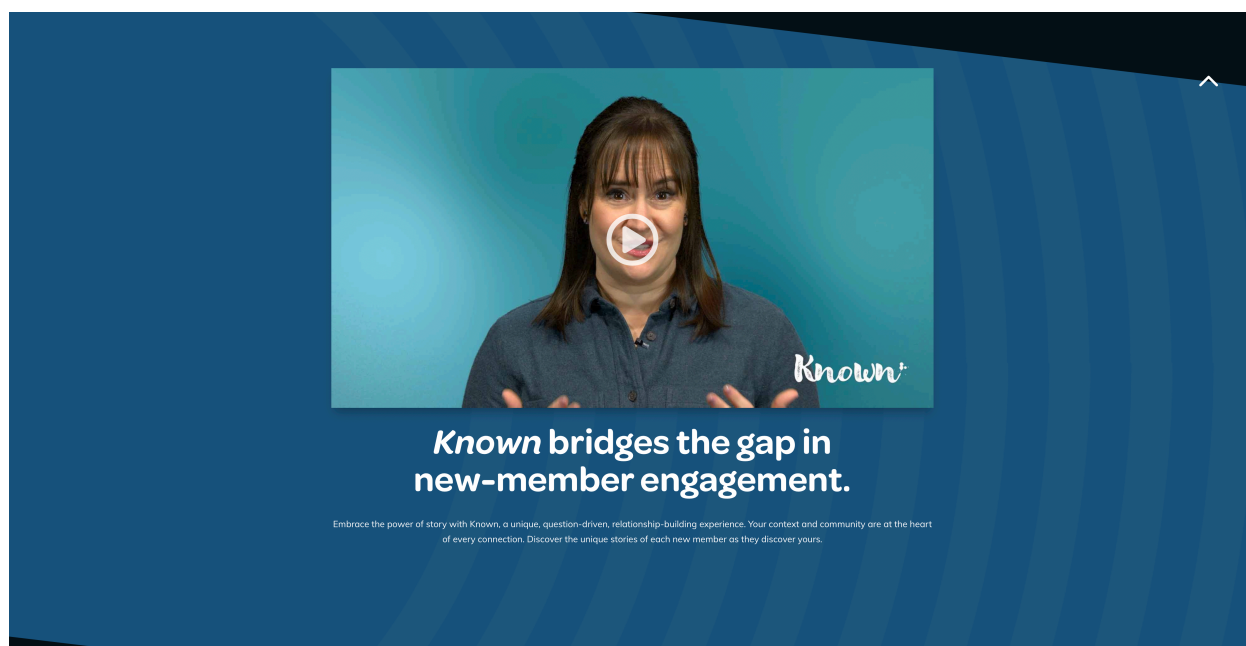
Church Leader Experience

Churches interested in learning about *Known* will navigate from the *Known* homepage using the “For Churches” button to <https://beknown.church/known/churches/>. This section illustrates the user experience prior to full account access. Because of that, this section is designed primarily as a marketing tool, providing background for why *Known* was developed, stating the case for why *Known* could benefit the local church, and providing a brief introduction to the central focus on story.

The user experience—from the landing page, to scheduling a consultation, to registering for an account—is illustrated in figures 8-12, with web links outside of the “For Churches” landing page included in the figure description.



FIGURE 8: KNOWN CHURCH LEADER LANDING PAGE



**FIGURE 9: TRAINING VIDEO EXPLAINING WHY KNOWN WAS DEVELOPED
(TRANSCRIPT AVAILABLE IN THE APPENDIX)**

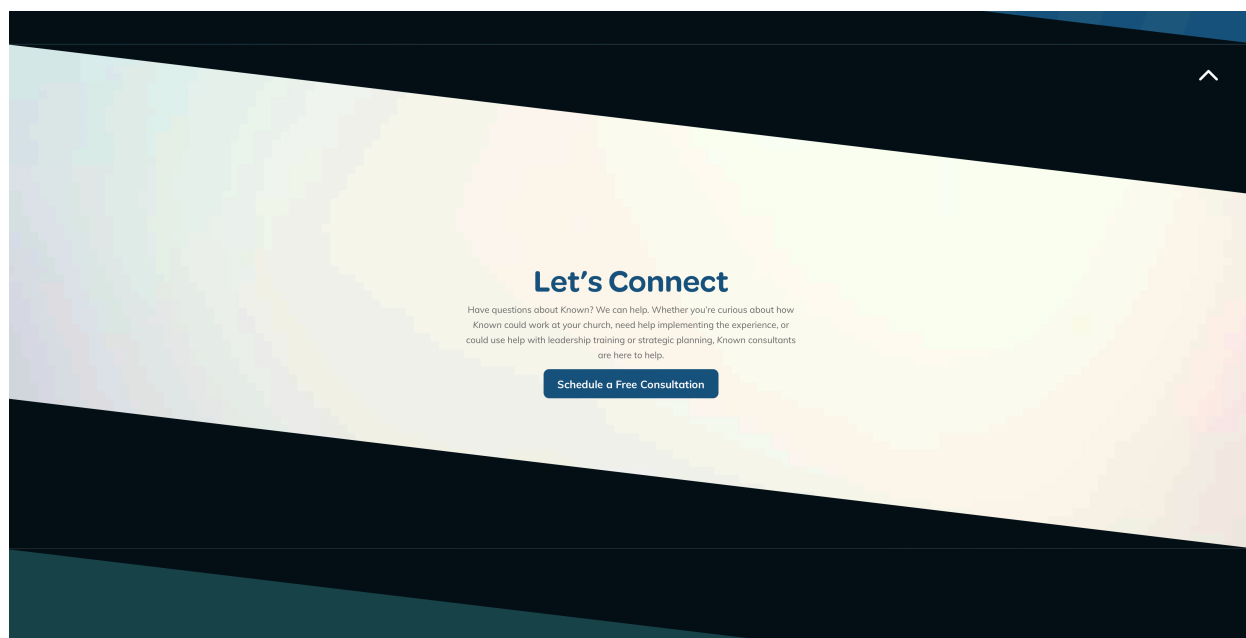


FIGURE 10: LINK TO PERSONAL CALENDAR ON CALENDLY USED TO SCHEDULE CONSULTATION MEETINGS

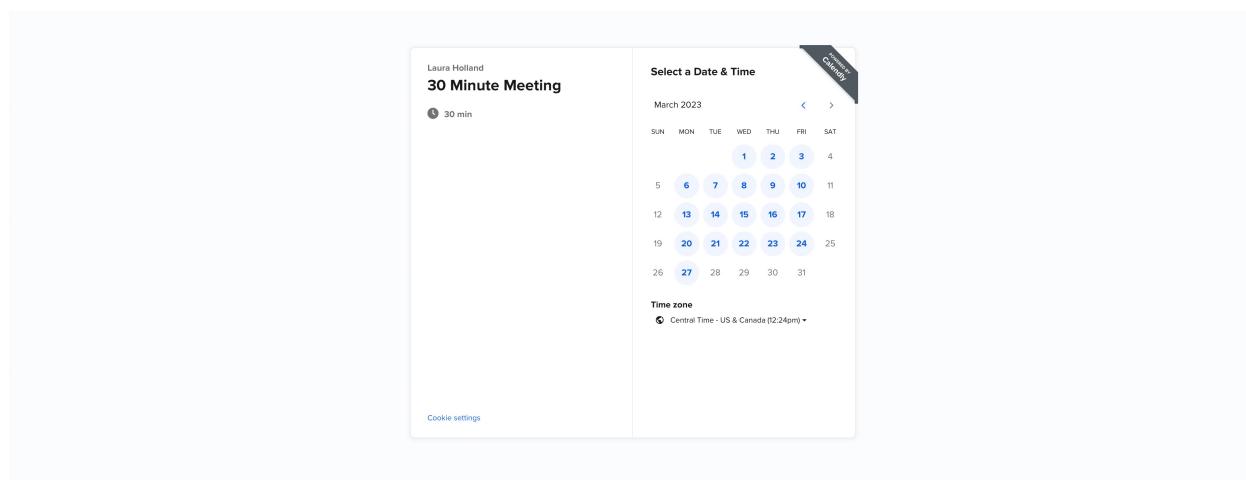


FIGURE 11: PERSONAL CALENDAR FOR LEADERS TO SCHEDULE CONSULTATION MEETINGS [HTTPS://CALENDLY.COM/LCULVER/30MIN](https://CALENDLY.COM/LCULVER/30MIN)

FIGURE 12: KNOWN CHURCH LEADER ACCOUNT REGISTRATION PAGE WITH WHY STORYTELLING VIDEO LINK (TRANSCRIPT AVAILABLE IN THE APPENDIX) [HTTPS://BEKNOWN.CHURCH/KNOWN/CHURCHES/SIGN-UP/](https://beknown.church/known/churches/sign-up/)

Registered User Experience

Once a church leader has registered for a *Known* account, the website focus shifts from marketing to resourcing. Each leader account grants the user access to all *Known* resources designed to support the implementation, launch, and running of a *Known* experience. Though over 65 individual resources are included with each account, the webpage design is intended to logically guide each user through the process without overwhelming them with information. The ministry consulting offerings and Calendly scheduler are also highlighted in this section to ensure leaders see that although sufficient resources exist for them to successfully implement *Known* on their own, the option for individualized and direct training and support is one click away.

The leader account landing page, <https://beknown.church/known/account/>, is the hub for access to the Implementation Guide, Session Materials, and Training and Resources and has options to navigate across the site. The registered user experience, with the main sections explored in more detail, is illustrated in figures 13-34.

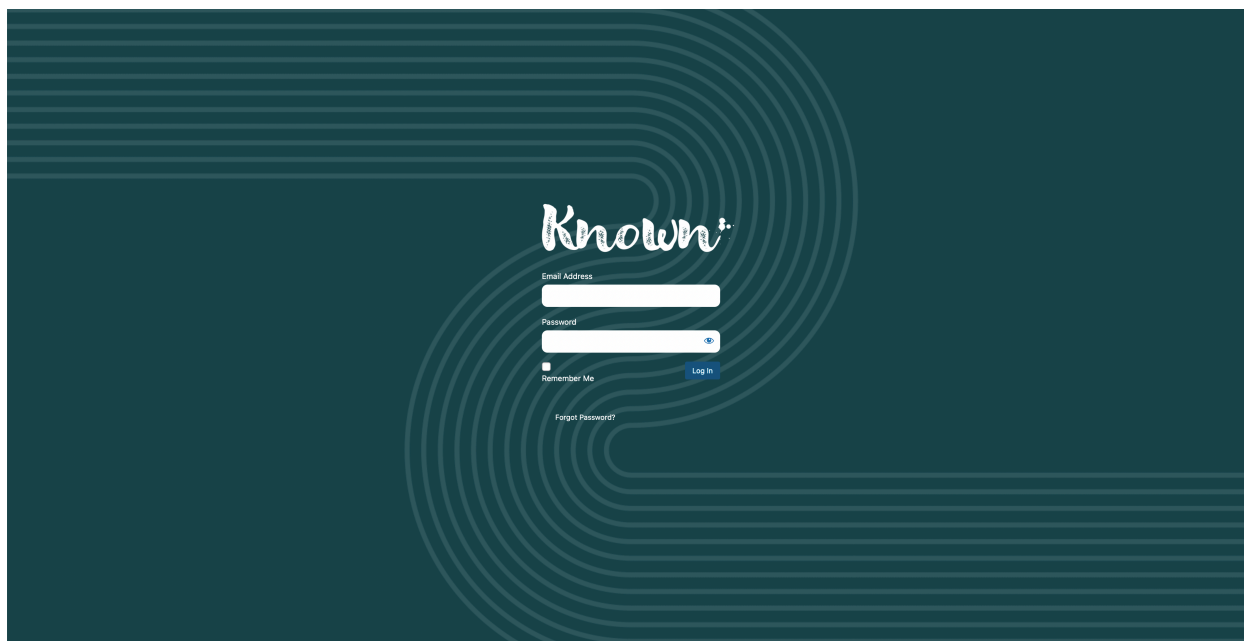


FIGURE 13: KNOWN REGISTERED USER LOGIN PAGE

[HTTPS://BEKNOWN.CHURCH/LOGIN](https://beknown.church/login)

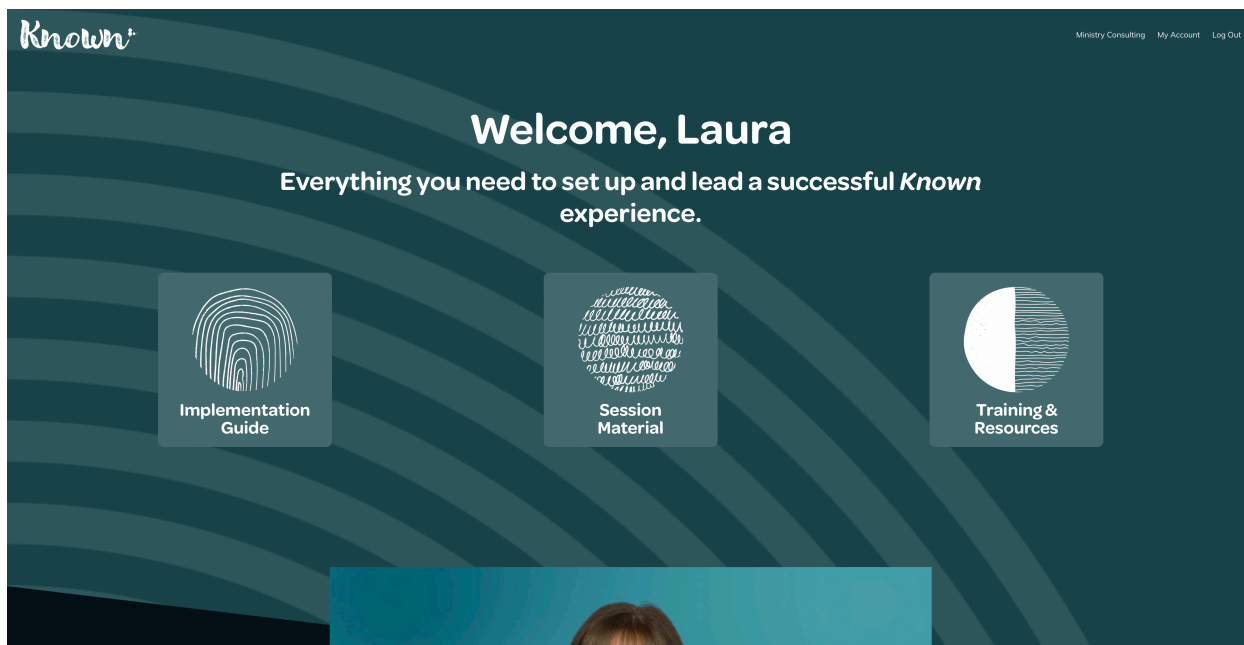


FIGURE 14: KNOWN REGISTERED USER LANDING PAGE

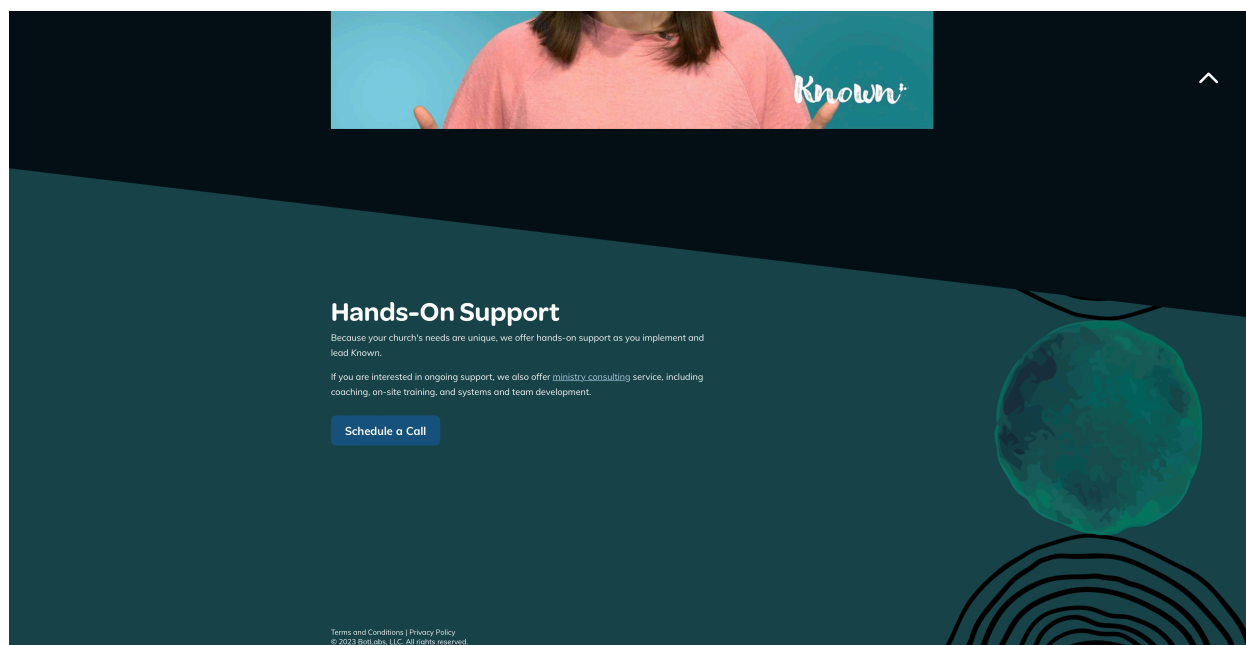


FIGURE 15: KNOWN REGISTERED USER SUPPORT LINK AND *WHAT IS KNOWN?* TRAINING VIDEO (TRANSCRIPT AVAILABLE IN THE APPENDIX)

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

The nine-step Implementation Guide, <https://beknown.church/known/account/implementation-guide/>, walks church leaders through each element of preparing for, equipping leaders, and launching *Known*. Because *Known* is designed as a fully customizable experience, the Implementation Guide provides benchmarks and structure more than prescriptive practices, while still walking church leaders step-by-step through the process. Designed to be easily understood steps with supporting resources aiding each one, the Implementation Guide responds to stakeholder feedback requesting a more streamlined explanation of how, in practice, *Known* can be achieved by the local church. Figures 16-25 show each step within the guide.



FIGURE 16: KNOWN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE LANDING PAGE

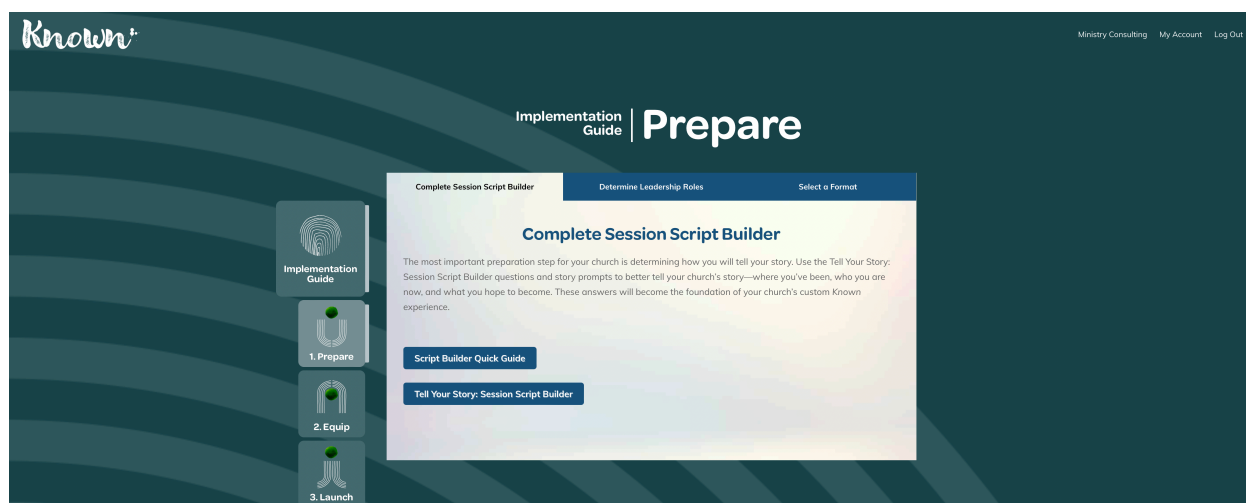


FIGURE 17: KNOWN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE PREPARE STEP ONE: COMPLETE SESSION SCRIPT BUILDER (LINKED RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN THE APPENDIX)

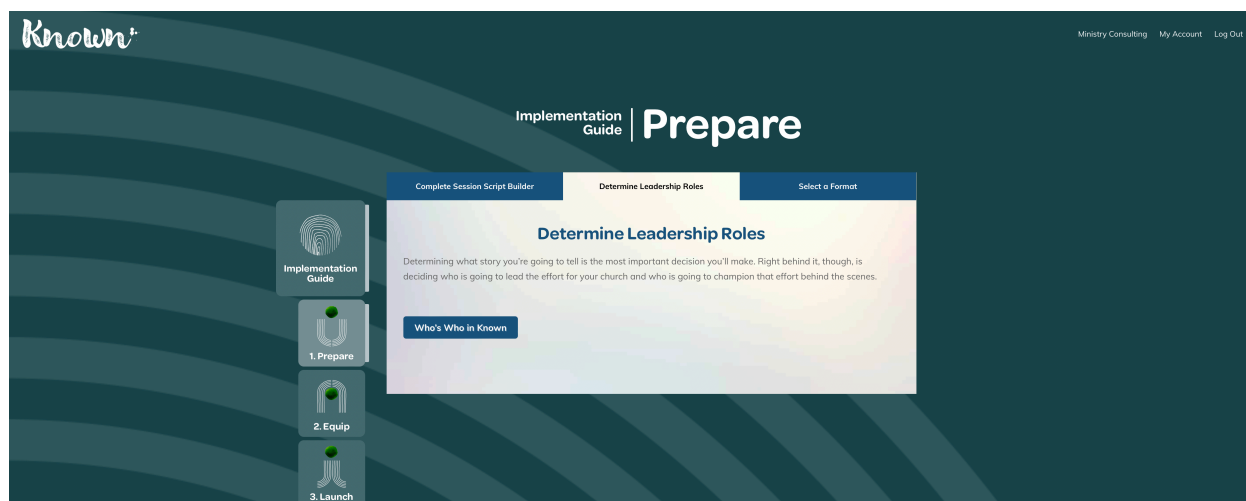


FIGURE 18: KNOWN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE PREPARE STEP TWO: DETERMINE LEADERSHIP ROLES (LINKED RESOURCE AVAILABLE IN THE APPENDIX)

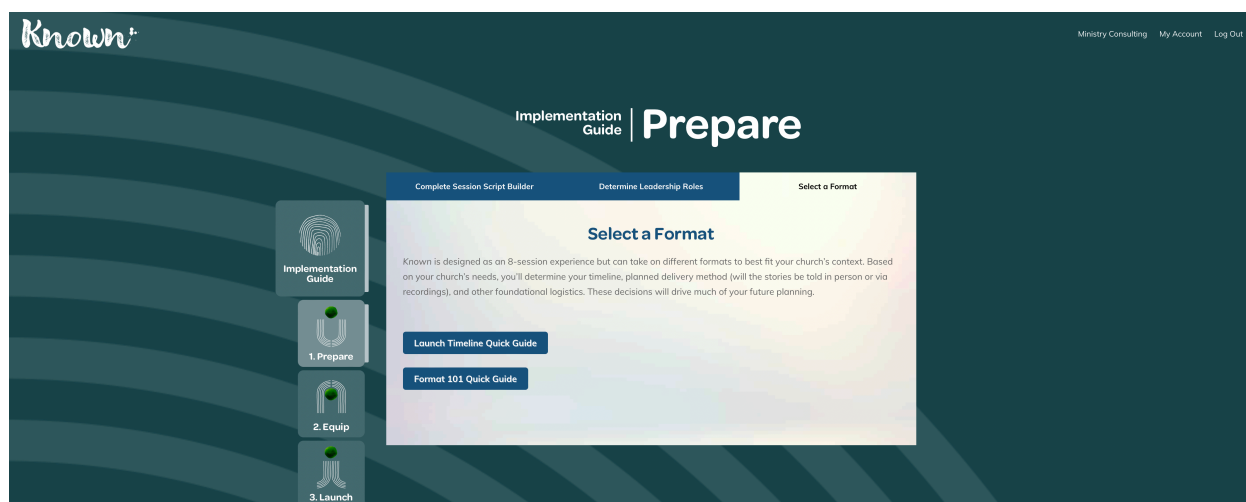


FIGURE 19: KNOWN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE PREPARE STEP THREE: SELECT A FORMAT (LINKED RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN THE APPENDIX)

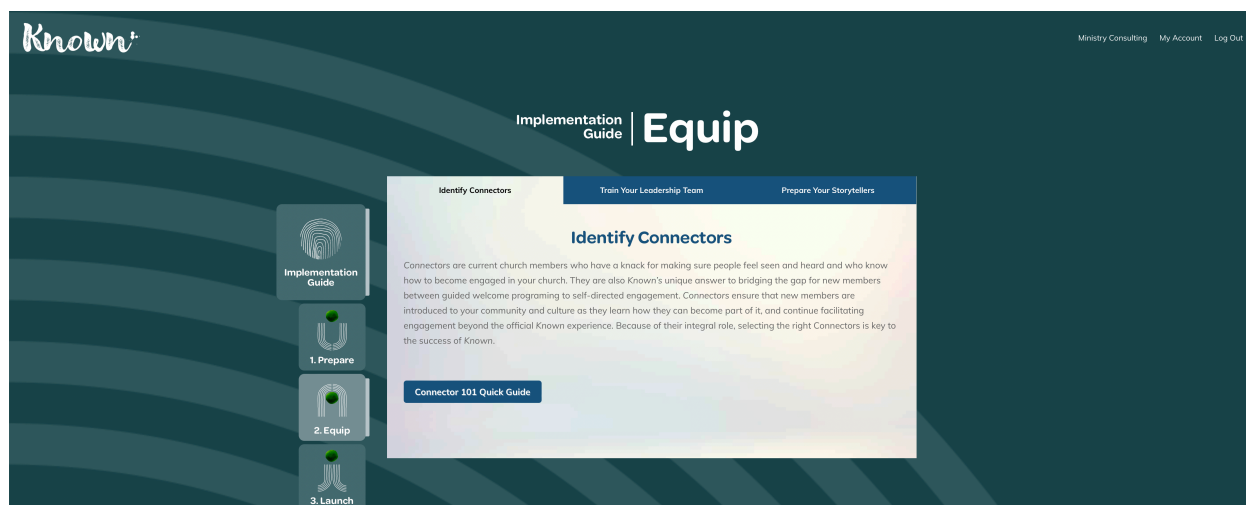


FIGURE 20: KNOWN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE EQUIP STEP ONE: IDENTIFY CONNECTORS (LINKED RESOURCE AVAILABLE IN THE APPENDIX)

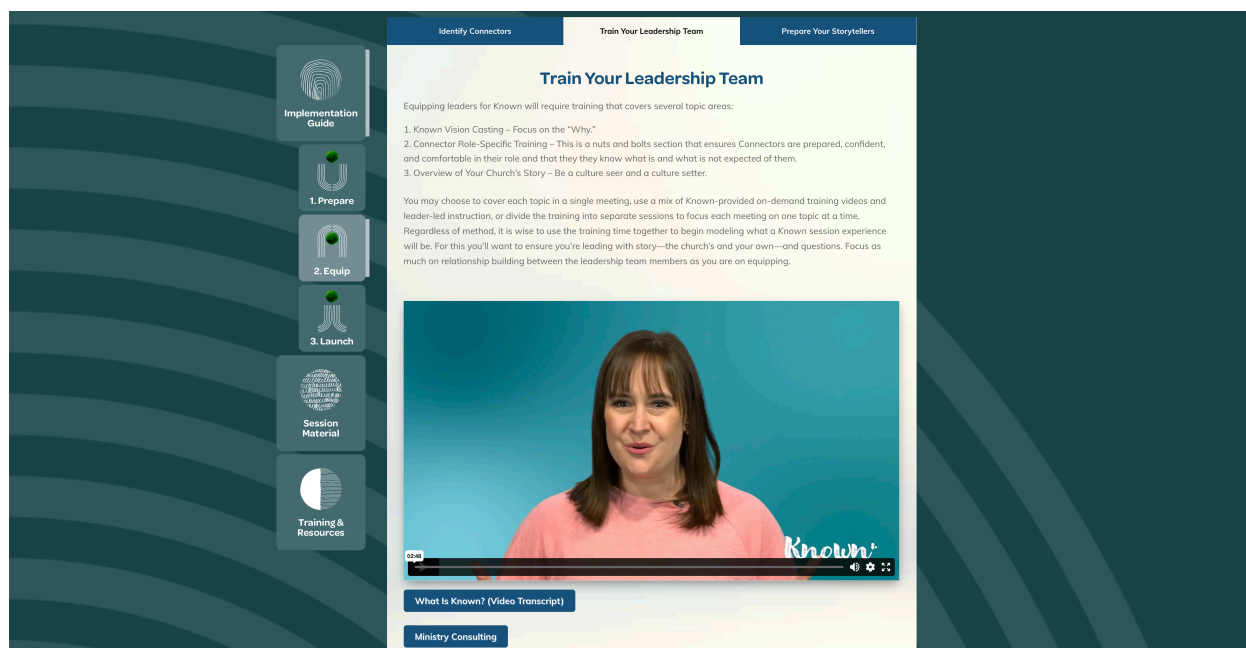


FIGURE 21: KNOWN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE EQUIP STEP TWO: TRAIN YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM AND WHAT IS KNOWN? TRAINING VIDEO (VIDEO TRANSCRIPT AND LINKED RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN THE APPENDIX)



FIGURE 22: KNOWN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE EQUIP STEP THREE: PREPARE YOUR STORYTELLERS AND WHY STORYTELLING? TRAINING VIDEO (VIDEO TRANSCRIPT AND LINKED RESOURCE AVAILABLE IN THE APPENDIX)

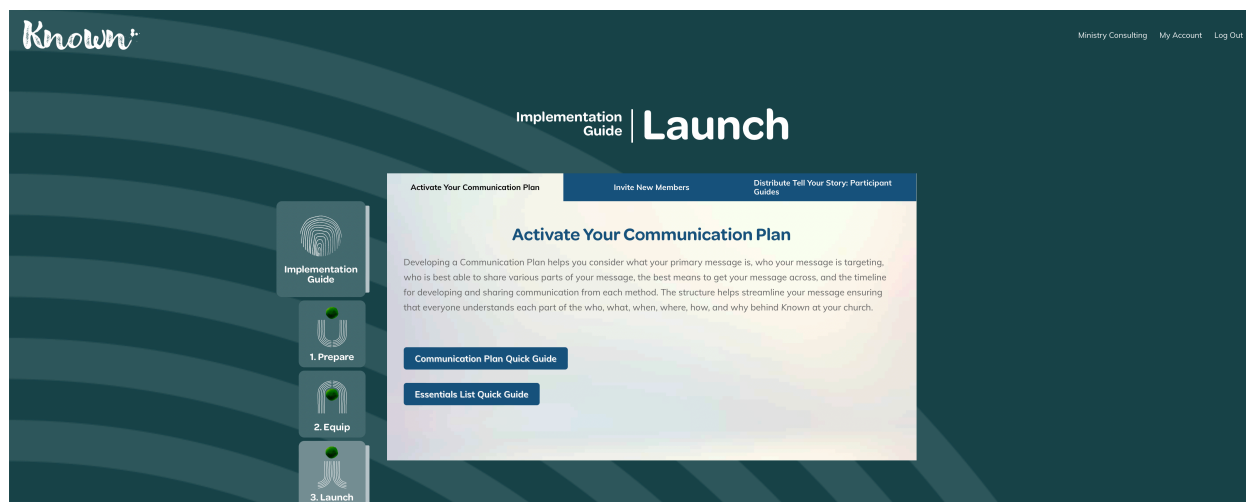


FIGURE 23: KNOWN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE LAUNCH STEP ONE: ACTIVATE YOUR COMMUNICATION PLAN (LINKED RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN THE APPENDIX)

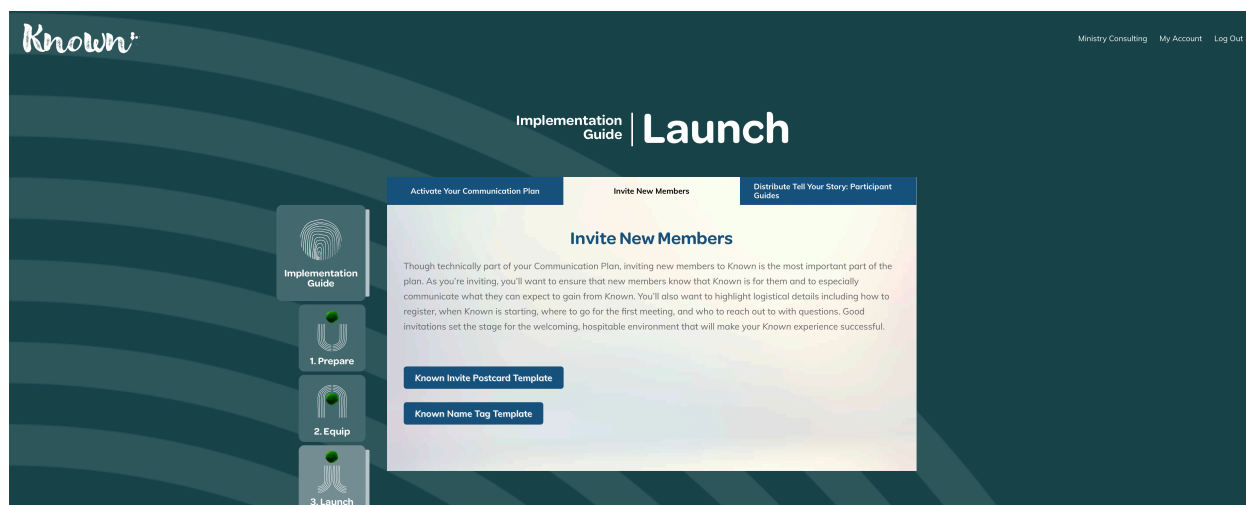


FIGURE 24: KNOWN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE LAUNCH STEP TWO: INVITE NEW MEMBERS (LINKED RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN THE APPENDIX)

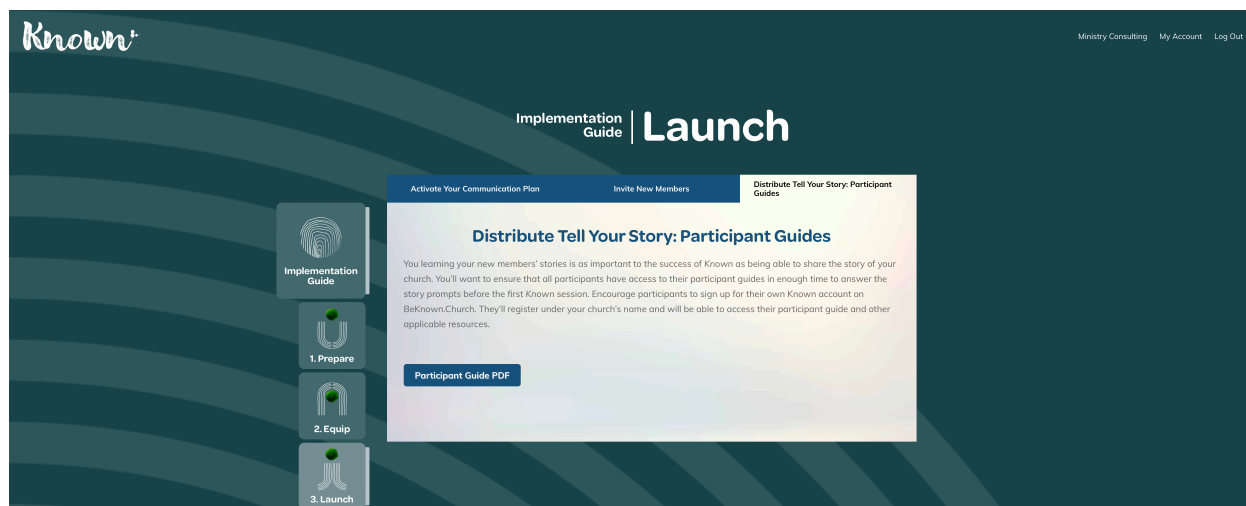


FIGURE 25: KNOWN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE LAUNCH STEP THREE: DISTRIBUTE TELL YOUR STORY: PARTICIPANT GUIDES (LINKED RESOURCE AVAILABLE IN THE APPENDIX)

SESSION MATERIALS

Resources available to registered *Known* users are intended to be holistic, aiding implementation, *Known* launch, and the running of a *Known* experience, and are primarily organized by process step. The Session Materials landing page, however, is the hub for all session-specific resources, organized by session. Not only does this structure allow for a central resourcing section, but it also acknowledges and responds to the various ways adults process information.⁴ A resource originally intended to support implementation, for example, might, in practice, better serve an individual leader while they are running *Known*. Providing various avenues to access resources ensures facilitators have what they need when they need it.

Figures 26-28, showing the Session Material introduction tab and Session Two: Mission tab and resources found at <https://beknown.church/known/account/session-material/>, are followed by the full versions of the six supporting resources for Session Two: Mission. They are included as representations of the associated resources available for each of the 8 sessions, the remainder of which can be found in full in the appendix.

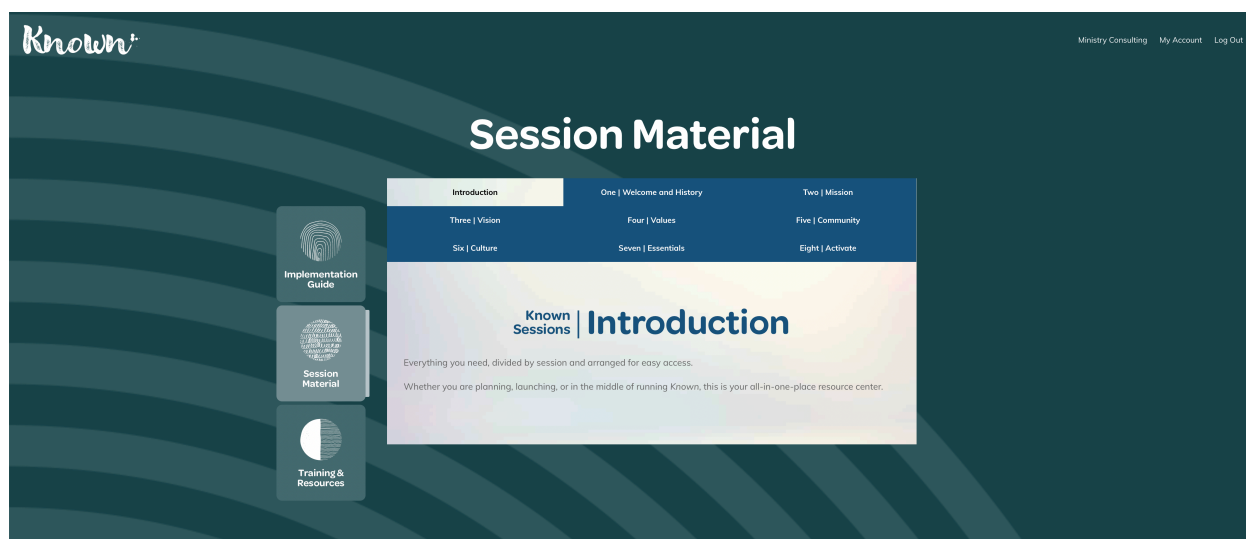


FIGURE 26: KNOWN SESSION MATERIAL LANDING PAGE

⁴ Heather Zempel, *Community is Messy: The Perils and Promise of Small Group Ministry*. Dowers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012.

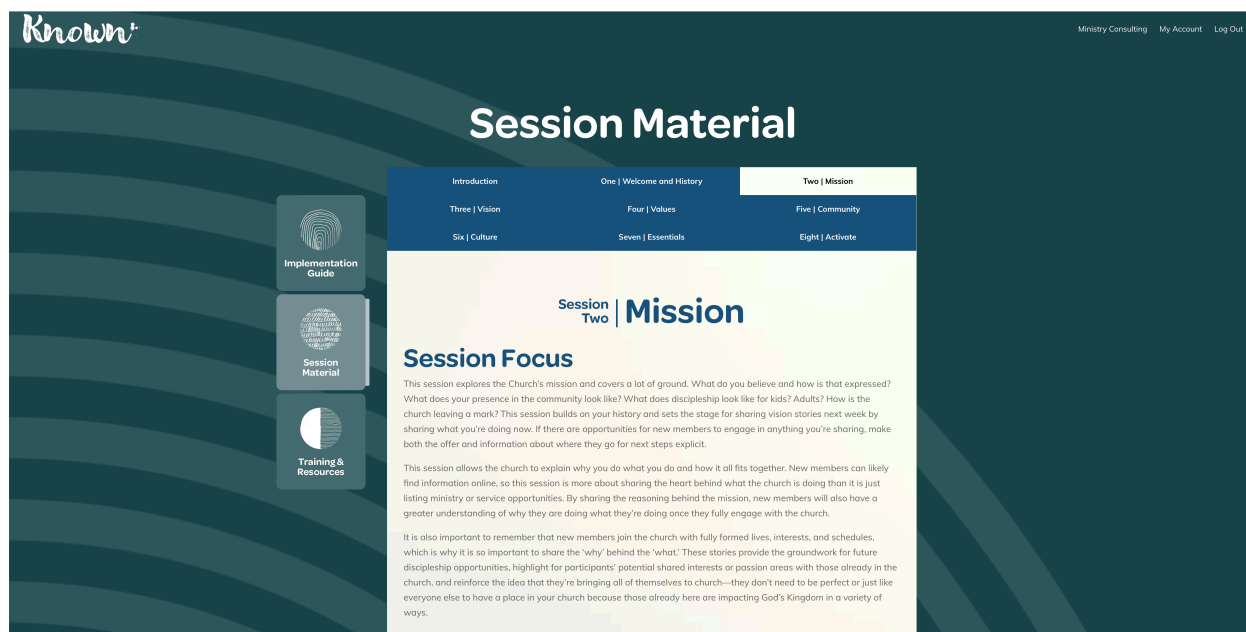


FIGURE 27: KNOWN SESSION MATERIAL SESSION TWO| MISSION LANDING PAGE AND SESSION FOCUS

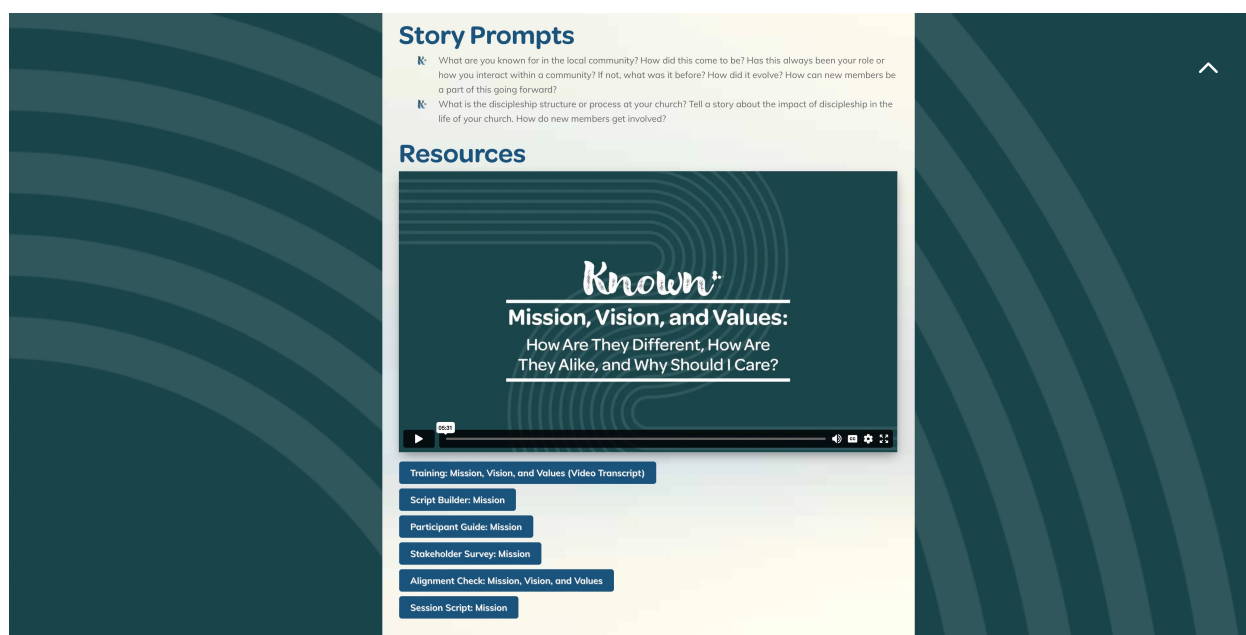


FIGURE 28: KNOWN SESSION MATERIAL SESSION TWO| MISSION LANDING PAGE AND STORY PROMPTS AND RESOURCES

Known Training

Mission, Vision, and Values: How Are They Different, How Are They Alike, and Why Should I Care?

When we discuss mission, vision, and values, it's not uncommon to find ourselves using the terms interchangeably. Though the overlap that exists should you chart the three using a Venn Diagram has the potential to be sizable, they're not synonymous nor are they necessarily aligned.

Let's start at the beginning. For our purposes, the definitions of mission, vision, and values are:

Mission: What you're doing—your actions in the community, discipleship practices, ministry and service opportunities, how you engage children, youth, families, and singles, and what the day-to-day engagement of your church looks like.

Vision: Where you're going—these are the driving goals or aspirations, the plans for depth or growth, what's next and the hope that keeps you striving for what's next.

Values: Expressions of what matters most to you—principles, ideals or standards of behavior that you, as a church community, act upon and your behavior reflects. The goal is practiced values (a true reflection of who you are and what you're doing now) instead of aspirational values (who you hope to be/your intentions behind your behavior regardless of how others experience it).

In our healthiest state, personally and communally, what we're doing actively supports and moves us toward where we hope to go and both are visible reflections of what we claim to be our values. In other words, our mission drives us toward our vision, both of which are in line with our values. When all three are aligned, the overlap in the hypothetical Venn Diagram will be greater because all three elements

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will support and inform the others. For example, if your vision is to build a discipleship culture, your mission—what you're actually doing—could include service opportunities, small groups, bible studies, and teaching on personal spiritual practices, and you would value curiosity, and growth, and community, which would be demonstrated by what you do and spoken about clearly. Organizations outside of the church will often encourage discontinuing programs or activities that aren't clearly in alignment with the stated mission, vision, and values. That practice isn't as clear cut in the church with the various roles our members and leadership play and what is required of us organizationally, but it is still beneficial to take the time to consider what you're doing and why.

Not sure if your mission, vision, and values are aligned? Check out the [Mission, Vision, Values Alignment Check](#) worksheet and activity.

What about misaligned mission, vision, and values? In this hypothetical Venn Diagram, the three circles might barely touch, with the daily activities and programs moving the church in a different direction than the spoken vision, and reflecting practiced values that are anywhere close to the aspirational ones. In this scenario, the mission is leading you one way, but you're talking about a vision over there, all while your values communicate something different entirely. If you're in this state, you are probably very aware of the negative impact of these competing focus areas.

For most of us, however, we're not in complete alignment and we're not in such chaos that our mission, vision, and values taken on their own look like they represent three entirely different communities. Instead, we might have found ourselves one or two degrees off course, but recognize that should we fail to address these navigational shifts as they come—either through redirecting ourselves to better align with what we communicate or changing the way we talk about what we do, who we are, and where we're going to better reflect what is actually happening. This self awareness (church awareness, in this instance) helps leadership make decisions, church members have better clarity on what they are a part of, and the community in which you serve sees that who you say you are matches what they see you doing.

For corporations, understanding the relationship between these three elements is largely driven by their consumers, clients, and stockholders. Decisions are profit-driven and consumer-focused. There's nothing wrong with that for corporations because that's why they exist. But that's not why we exist. We exist to

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be Jesus' hands and feet and to learn how to see where Jesus is at work in the world and join in on that mission, with your church doing so in the context-specific way you've been called to.

Is that unique purpose reflected in your mission, vision, and values?

Known Script Builder

Session 2: Mission

This session explores the Church's mission and covers a lot of ground. What do you believe and how is that expressed? What does your presence in the community look like? What does discipleship look like for kids? Adults? How is the church leaving a mark? This session builds on your history and sets the stage for sharing vision stories next week by sharing what you're doing now. If there are opportunities for new members to engage in anything you're sharing, make both the offer and information about where they go for next steps explicit.

This session allows the church to explain why you do what you do and how it all fits together. New members can likely find information online, so this session is more about sharing the heart behind what the church is doing than it is just listing ministry or service opportunities. By sharing the reasoning behind the mission, new members will also have a greater understanding of why they are doing what they're doing once they fully engage with the church.

It is also important to remember that new members join the church with fully formed lives, interests, and schedules, which is why it is so important to share the 'why' behind the 'what.' These stories provide the groundwork for future discipleship opportunities, highlight for participants' potential shared interests or passion areas with those already in the church, and reinforce the idea that they're bringing all of themselves to church—they don't need to be perfect or just like everyone else to have a place in your church because those already here are impacting God's Kingdom in a variety of ways.

STORY PROMPTS

What are you known for in the local community? How did this come to be? Has this always been your role or how you interact within a community? If not, what was it before? How did it evolve? How can new members be a part of this going forward?

What is the discipleship structure or process at your church? Tell a story about the impact of discipleship in the life of your church. How do new members get involved?

SESSION BUILDER

Using the Story Prompts answers as a guide, consider the following questions to help you develop the story that will be shared during the large group time for this session. The answer to who is the best person to tell this part of the story will likely determine your delivery method (in person, video, hybrid, panel discussion, Q&A) and any additional logistics you'll need to consider when running this session.

Primary Story Takeaway (What is the story you're seeking to tell? What story do you want *Known* participants to be able to tell after the session?):

Whose input do we need in order to tell the fullest story (consider ministry leaders, mission team participants, members who support a community cause your church has rallied behind, someone who has been helped by a ministry or service team):

Who is the best person to tell this part of the story during the large group?

Associated Training and Resources

Defining Mission, Vision, and Values: How are They Different, How are They Alike, and Why Should I Care?

Mission, Vision, and Values Alignment Check Worksheet

Session 2 Survey for Stakeholder Input

Known Participant Guide

Session 2: Mission

"Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop, within a yard of hell." — C.T. Studd

"The Christians' focus...was on living faithfully—in the belief that when people's lives are rehabilitated in the way of Jesus, others will want to join them."
— Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire*

Food scientists are discipleship experts, they just might not realize it. Combining chemistry, biology, and other scientific specialties, food scientists discover new food sources, study the nutritional makeup of food, and research ways to make food healthier and safer. Because of this, they're experts on the difference between fermentation and pickling. Fermentation is a natural process in which one food, through interaction with multiple bacteria and microorganisms over a considerable amount of time, becomes a wholly different food with a new name, complex flavors, and new acidic notes. Pickling, sometimes called cheater fermentation, is a quick process in which the starting ingredient is combined with acids and other flavors from the beginning, but there is no microbial activity and no transformation of the product occurs. Discipleship and our spiritual growth follow a very similar pattern to that of fermentation. We grow through many interactions with God and others, and, over time, find that we've become a wholly different person, one who is more complex and more reflects Jesus. Though we sometimes want the timeframe and limited engagement of the quick pickling with the outcome of fermentation, whether talking sauerkraut or disciples, that's just not how it works.

Discipleship can be understood as learning to follow Jesus's character, ways, and mission and teaching others to do the same.^[1] So part of discipleship is mission, and specifically, following Jesus' mission. Jesus' mission was to do his Father's business, and he shared more specifically how that would look when he preached a sermon

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found in Luke 4, rooted in text from the book of Isaiah. He continued to share what it meant to do only what he saw his Father doing (John 5:19) through the way he carried himself and the relationships he had with others. In short, his mission was what he did—the actions he took and the interactions he had.

Your life mission can also be summed up by what you do, and how it is a physical expression of who you are. So what is the story behind your mission? And, following what Jesus modeled, how does your mission reflect “the Father’s business?” The more you develop your story to understand where God is alive and active in it, the more you can come to understand and identify elements of God’s story and where that story has been enacted and activated in you. The more we learn to notice this, the better we become at seeing how our story—our life’s mission—is a part of God’s story.

STORY PROMPTS

Preface

What activity do you think is worth taking a long time to do or complete? To help answer this, consider what you could spend hours doing.

For Your Consideration

Do you find yourself open to “fermentation” style discipleship or have you preferred “quick-pickling”? Have you experienced the results of one or both of these styles? What is the difference?

Plot Points

When it comes to mission, it’s important to remember that you’re already doing it! We can revise, refine, or reinvent what we’re doing, but you’re not starting from scratch. What is your current mission? Is there anything you’d like to revise, refine, or reinvent?

What does it mean to “do the Father’s business?” Does that change how you understand what you do? Does it make you want to change anything?

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The Story Continues

What is one way your faith can act beyond the walls of your church? This week, try to make it happen.

Source: ^[1] Buehring, David. *Discipleship Journey: A Guide for Making Disciples That Make Disciple-Makers*. Oviedo, FL: Highertlife Development Services, 2011

Known Stakeholder Survey

Session 2: Mission

To prepare for *Known*, our church is reaching out to various stakeholders within our church community to be able to tell the fullest story of our church. Could you help us tell the story of our mission (what we're doing)?

Please use the Story Prompts (questions) below to guide your response. You may answer them directly, with a story, or experience that highlights what you'd like new members to know about our church's mission.

☐ I'd be willing to tell my story during/taped for a *Known* session

Story Prompts

What are you known for in the local community? How did this come to be? Has this always been your role or how you interact within a community? If not, what was it before? How did it evolve? How can new members be a part of this going forward?

What is the discipleship structure or process at your church? Tell a story about the impact of discipleship in the life of your church. How do new members get involved?

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Known Training

Mission, Vision, and Values Alignment Check

Every once in a while we can all benefit from an alignment check of our mission, vision, and values. For this exercise, they're defined as:

Mission: What you're doing—your actions in the community, discipleship practices, ministry and service opportunities, how you engage children, youth, families, and singles, and what the day-to-day engagement of your church looks like.

Vision: Where you're going—these are the driving goals or aspirations, the plans for depth or growth, what's next and the hope that keeps you striving for what's next.

Values: Expressions of what matters most to you—principles, ideals or standards of behavior that you, as a church community, act upon and your behavior reflects. The goal is practiced values (a true reflection of who you are and what you're doing now) instead of aspirational values (who you hope to be/your intentions behind your behavior regardless of how others experience it).

For most, both personally and communally, we operate best when what we do (our Mission) supports where we hope to go (our vision), and both are accurate reflections of what we claim to be our values. When one (much less all) are a degree or two off course, applying the ideas behind the air navigation "1 in 60 rule," we might not notice it much at first, but the farther we travel on our new course the farther away we find ourselves from our intended goal. In other words, it's worth a little time now to avoid a necessarily large course correction down the road.

Step 1

The first step is to make three lists, one each for your mission, vision, and values. You can use the worksheet provided or record the answers for each anywhere else, as long as you're able to easily refer back to them.

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Step 2

Once you've made your lists, go through them one-by-one and note if there are any (1) themes, (2) outliers, (3) if something surprising is included, or (4) if something surprising is missing. This is your synthesized information.

Step 3

Using both the original lists and the synthesized information, compare and contrast each of the lists with the others. Look specifically for whether or not (1) what you're doing aligns with where you want to go, (2) what you're doing aligns with your values, (3) if where you want to go aligns with your values, (4) your listed values are practiced or aspirational, and (5) taken holistically, how the three lists fit together.

Step 4

To this point each step has been based on discovery—there is no right or wrong answer, there is just a reflection and analysis of what *is*. In step 4 there is still no right or wrong, but this is the time for reflection based on what you discover in step 3. If there is misalignment between any or all of the areas, now is the time to consider next step options.

Taking misalignment between mission and values as an example, you might determine that living out your aspirational values and turning them into practiced values is the most important and make a plan for realigning what you do to best reflect that. You could also decide that what you're doing is, in fact, reflective of who you want the church to be and where and how you want to be engaging. In this case, alignment would look like reevaluating values so they are practiced values reflective of your actual mission.

Actions that come out of this step will vary based on your church context and culture, but will be based on a deepened awareness of who you are, where you're going, and the practiced values your actions reflect.

Step 5

Repeat the Mission, Vision, and Values Alignment Check Worksheet as needed.

Mission, Vision, and Values Alignment Check Worksheet

Mission What You're Doing	Vision Where You're Going	Values What Your Actions Say
<ul style="list-style-type: none">	<ul style="list-style-type: none">	<ul style="list-style-type: none">

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Known Session Scripts

Session 2: Mission

Pre-Session Prep

Using your answers from the Story Prompts and Session Builder, determine:

- What is the main story you want to tell?
- Whose stories will you include?
 - Reach out and gather the stories.
 - Pull out themes, specific quotes, and any full story you'd like to include.
- Who will tell this part of the story?
 - Invite the storyteller(s) to the session of *Known*.
 - Explain their role and the story you'd like them to tell.
 - Provide the highlights or any additional story details they're to include.
(Best practice is to share a draft of the transcript the storyteller will use at least 48 hours before the session to allow time to edit and align.)

Large Group

30 Minutes

Facilitator:

- Welcome participants back to *Known*.
- Reintroduce *Known* facilitation team and Connectors and provide a brief reminder of how the session time is broken up and what participants can expect for the session.
- Briefly introduce the main idea of Session 2: Mission.
 - Intro Script: *"This week we're discussing mission. Jesus' mission was summed up as doing 'His Father's business.' In other words, his mission was what he was doing. When we're talking about the church's mission or our personal mission, it's the same. Our mission is what we're doing."*

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- Share a short story about your engagement in the mission of your church, or your mission personally.
- Introduce this session's Storyteller
 - Why are they the one(s) telling this session's story?
 - What role do they play in the church/where are new members most likely to see them outside of *Known*?

Storyteller:

- Using the responses to the questions within Session 2 Story Prompts and Stakeholder Input Surveys, tell the story of the mission of your church.
- Remember to provide specific examples of how participants can become involved in the church's mission in your story.

Small Group

60 Minutes

Facilitator/Connector:

- Introductions - consider using the participant "Preface" question as an icebreaker. [What activity do you think is worth taking a long time to do or complete? Or, what could you spend hours doing?]
- Small group time is participant focused, but on the second session you'll still need to highly facilitate conversation. Encourage participants to tell stories, invite conversation, and model asking good follow-on questions.
 - Reminders and Tips:
 - If a participant is hesitant to share, don't force it. The group needs to be a safe space and some participants will be more comfortable listening than talking.
 - Encourage Connectors to share their stories, too.
 - Try out different group arrangements to determine which fits your particular participants best. Pair participants off, share stories as a whole group, divide by even or odd birthdays. Be creative and pay attention to the way the group responds to the various modes.

Regroup

5 Minutes

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Facilitator:

- Thank participants and Connectors for coming to *Known*.
- Give announcements or reminders, specifically encouraging participants to complete their “The Story Continues” challenge to plan a way for their faith to act outside of the walls of the church this week.
- Give a teaser for next session’s topic: Vision.
 - Teaser Script: *“Next time we meet we’ll be discussing Vision; where the church is going, what you hope to do, and how they’re a reflection of the vision Jesus has for the church. Remember to complete the Story Prompts in your Tell Your Story guide to help prepare for our small group storytelling and discussion.”*

TRAINING AND RESOURCES

Organized by resource type—Trainings, Quick Guides, and Resources—all *Known* resources are available within tabs of the Training and Resource section, <https://beknown.church/known/account/training-and-resources/>. Trainings include on-demand training videos and the corresponding transcripts, designed to vision cast, aid churches in completing their Tell The Story: Session Script Builder, and help train leadership and facilitation teams. Quick Guides are practical, technically-focused guides to aid logistical tasks related to *Known*. Resources is the most inclusive section, including worksheets, templates, session scripts, scripture reading plans, and more.

Many of these resources also exist elsewhere on the site with the corresponding session or implementation step, but are compiled here for easy, on-demand access. Figures 29-31 show the lists of available trainings and resources, all of which are available in full in the appendix.



FIGURE 29: LIST OF ALL VIDEO TRAININGS AND TRANSCRIPTS AVAILABLE TO *KNOWN* REGISTERED USERS (ALL TRANSCRIPTS AVAILABLE IN THE APPENDIX)



FIGURE 30: LIST OF ALL *QUICK GUIDES* AVAILABLE TO *KNOWN* REGISTERED USERS (ALL *QUICK GUIDES* AVAILABLE IN THE APPENDIX)



FIGURE 31: LIST OF RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO *KNOWN* REGISTERED USERS (ALL RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN FULL IN THE APPENDIX)

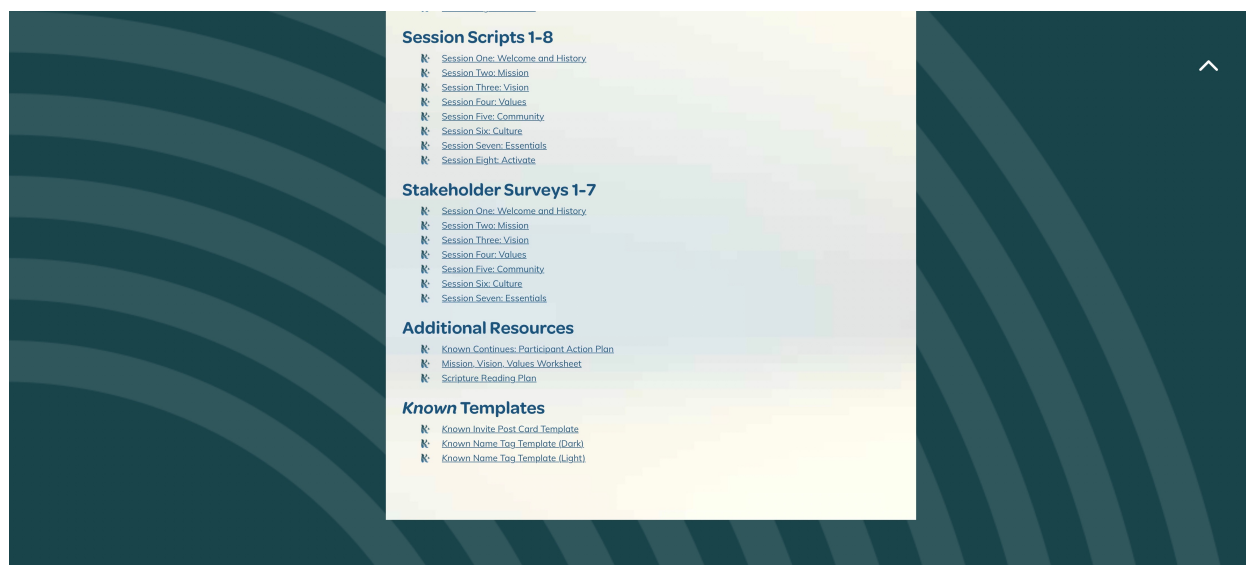


FIGURE 32: LIST OF RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO *Known* REGISTERED USERS (ALL RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN FULL IN THE APPENDIX)

ChurchLabs Consulting

ChurchLabs Consulting is the business side of *Known*. Building out ChurchLabs more fully is part of the project development plan, but the capability to schedule a consulting meeting was included in the initial launch of *Known* and the BeKnown.Church website. Figures 33 and 34 illustrate the ChurchLabs Consulting landing page, listing of offerings, and consulting philosophy.



FIGURE 33: CHURCHLABS CONSULTING, THE BUSINESS-SIDE OF *KNOWN*, LANDING PAGE

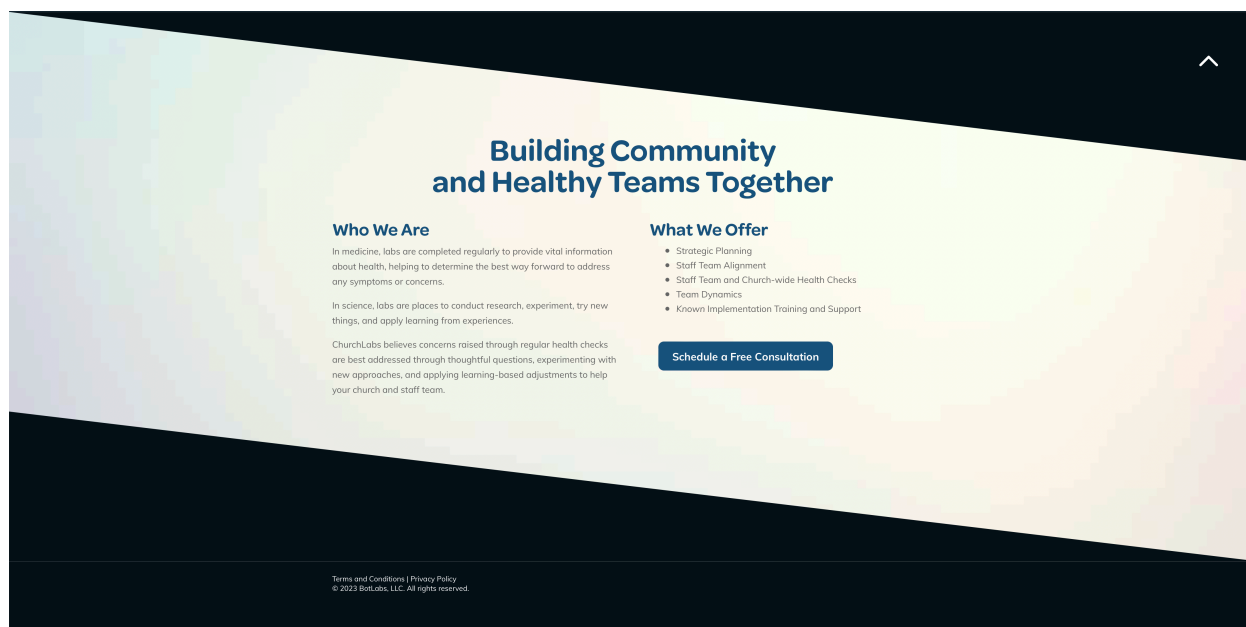


FIGURE 34: EXPLANATION OF CHURCHLABS ETHOS AND LIST OF BUSINESS OFFERINGS

Tell Your Story Resources

The central resources supporting the success of Known are the two Tell Your Story guides: *Tell Your Story: Story-Based, Question-Driven Prompts for Known* participant guide, and *Tell Your Story: Session Script Builder Story-Based, Question-Driven Prompts to Help Your Church be Known*. Each guide is rooted in the understanding that storytelling and asking good questions are powerful relationship building tools and are both included in full below.

Known

Tell Your Story:

Story-Based, Question-Driven Prompts for
Known

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Tell Your Story: Story Based, Question Driven Prompts for *Known*

This story is being told by:

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

What to Expect

Known is a story-based, question-driven experience designed to build relationships between you and your church. Everyone who enters the doors of our church brings with them unique callings, interests, and distinct backgrounds that shape who you are and, we hope, our church community too. You are the expert on you, so *Known* seeks to celebrate and set the stage for you to share who you are to become better known by the church. In turn, you'll learn about the church too; where we've been, who we are now, and how we hope to grow in the future. We know this requires trust and care, but we believe the result—knowing and being known—is worth it.

At the end of *Known*, our goal is for you to:

- 1) **Be Known** - Research shows that our most secure attachments occur when we feel known. The *Known* story framework is designed to help you communicate who you are and who you hope to be. Commitment to and investment in your church is important, but it's best reached when we are known.
- 2) **Know the Church** - More than service times and program offerings you can find on a website, *Known's* framework is designed to help your church explain their history, mission, vision, values, and culture—essentially the who, what, when, why, and how—giving you an inside look into what drives the church and where you fit in.
- 3) **Know how to engage with the church** - The ability to simply navigate the church's programming options isn't the ultimate goal; it's the freedom and confidence to fully engage in spiritual formation and discipleship programs, knowing why they exist and that you belong.

As important as we think this is, and as much as we believe in the power of story, we also recognize that there's really no way around the truth that sharing our stories can be difficult. What we most long for, and can be most fearful of, is to be known. It's a conundrum Pastor Timothy Keller explains well in his book, *The Meaning of Marriage*, when he writes, "To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved

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is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.” Even when we want to be known, the required vulnerability can sometimes feel like too much to take on. The reality of being fully known can make us fearful and feel overexposed even with those we know best, but when asked to share with strangers it can be downright terrifying. But, as Ernest Hemmingway wrote, “the best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them.” Being known builds connections with others, but it requires vulnerability and it requires trust. *Known* is set up to help you navigate just that.

Before each session you’ll complete the corresponding Story Prompts to help you consider and prepare to share parts of your story—where you’ve been, who you are now, and/or what you hope is to come—during the session at *Known*. Each session’s Story Prompts will include *Preface*, *For Your Consideration*, *Plot Points*, and *The Story Continues*. *Preface* questions are best described as icebreakers. Icebreakers are typically used in group settings to help participants get comfortable with one another, but here they’re intended to help you get more comfortable telling your story; first to yourself and then, as you’re comfortable, with those in your new church. *For Your Consideration* questions are less for sharing and more for helping you reflect. You won’t be prompted to share any of these answers during *Known*, but they’ll prepare you for completing the *Plot Points* Story Prompts. *Plot Points* prompts will help you construct the story you can share at *Known*. You’re not required to share anything you don’t want to during the *Known* session, but even if you don’t plan to share during the group time, these prompts are important to complete to get the most out of the experience. *The Story Continues* prompts will be action-based encouragements for you to complete following the session.

We’re excited about the stories we’ll share, the stories we’ll hear, and the stories we’ll write together as we grow to know each other better.

Thank you for trusting us with your story.

Known Schedule

Session One: Welcome and History

Session Two: Mission

Session Three: Vision

Session Four: Values

Session Five: Community

Session Six: Culture

Session Seven: Essentials

Session Eight: Activate

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Session One | HISTORY AND WELCOME

"None of these stories taste exactly the same, but they all share at least a few of the same ingredients." — Jeremy French, founder of Making Whole

"Tell all the truth but tell it slant." — Emily Dickinson

Combining the power of storytelling with asking, and listening to, questions, *Known* leans into the method Jesus modeled. It is estimated that Jesus asked over 300 recorded questions during his earthly ministry and typically responded to questions posed to him with a story—over 30 are included in the Gospel accounts— instead of providing direct answers. We know, however, that the story *was* the answer. Embedded in story is truth that can otherwise be difficult to unearth, and questions encourage self-reflection and consideration of the past, allowing a more truthful story to emerge.^[1]

Stories connect us and build trust^[2] and questions have a transformative quality that not only establish connections that are deeper than those formed by other conversational practices, but also have the potential to elicit change.^[3] We're always telling stories^[4] in part because they help us learn to make sense of the world.^[5] Stories allow us to share where we've been, who we are now, and where we hope to go in the future. Our history, mission, vision, values, and culture all come together to help provide a full picture of who we are.

In the context of *Known*, stories highlight what makes each church, and everyone in it, unique. Emily Dickinson's poem, "Tell all the truth but tell it slant," encourages a slow, circuitous route to telling the whole truth so as not to overwhelm the listener. *Known* follows Dickinson's advice: though more piecemeal than circuitous, *Known* goes step by step to help develop our stories about who we are, what we're doing, and where we hope to go.

Throughout the sessions we'll share those stories.

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STORY PROMPTS

Preface

What made you happiest as a child? What makes you happiest now?

For Your Consideration

Everyone has a history, a story of where they come from, who they come from, and how they arrived where they are now. Using those three ideas, what is your history? How comfortable are you sharing these stories?

Plot Points

What do you hope to get out of *Known*?

At the end of *Known*, what do you hope others know about you? What can you do to make sure it's known?

What do you hope to know about the church? How can you best ensure that happens?

The Story Continues

Call or meet up with a fellow participant or Connector during the week.

Sources: ^[1] Radim Malinic, *Book of Branding: A Guide to Creating Brand Identity for Startups and Beyond*, (Brand Nu, 2019), 42.

^[2] Rob Biesenbach, *Unleash the Power of Storytelling: Win Hearts, Change Minds, Get Results* (Evanston, IL: Eastlawn Media, 2018).

^[3] Will Wise and Chad Littlefield, *Ask Powerful Questions: Create Conversations That Matter* (Highland Park, IL: Round Table Companies, 2017).

^[4] Matthew Dicks, *Storyworthy: Engage, Teach, Persuade, and Change Your Life Through the Power of Storytelling* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2018).

^[5] Rance Greene, *Instructional Story Design: Develop Stories That Train* (Alexandria, VA: ATD Press, 2020).

Session Two | MISSION

"Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop, within a yard of hell." — C.T. Studd

"The Christians' focus...was on living faithfully—in the belief that when people's lives are rehabilitated in the way of Jesus, others will want to join them."
— Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire*

Food scientists are discipleship experts, they just might not realize it. Combining chemistry, biology, and other scientific specialties, food scientists discover new food sources, study the nutritional makeup of food, and research ways to make food healthier and safer. Because of this, they're experts on the difference between fermentation and pickling. Fermentation is a natural process in which one food, through interaction with multiple bacteria and microorganisms over a considerable amount of time, becomes a wholly different food with a new name, complex flavors, and new acidic notes. Pickling, sometimes called cheater fermentation, is a quick process in which the starting ingredient is combined with acids and other flavors from the beginning, but there is no microbial activity and no transformation of the product occurs. Discipleship and our spiritual growth follow a very similar pattern to that of fermentation. We grow through many interactions with God and others, and, over time, find that we've become a wholly different person, one who is more complex and more reflects Jesus. Though we sometimes want the timeframe and limited engagement of the quick pickling with the outcome of fermentation, whether talking sauerkraut or disciples, that's just not how it works.

Discipleship can be understood as learning to follow Jesus's character, ways, and mission and teaching others to do the same.^[1] So part of discipleship is mission, and specifically, following Jesus' mission. Jesus' mission was to do his Father's business, and he shared more specifically how that would look when he preached a sermon found in Luke 4, rooted in text from the book of Isaiah. He continued to share what it meant to do only what he saw his Father doing (John 5:19) through the way he

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carried himself and the relationships he had with others. In short, his mission was what he did—the actions he took and the interactions he had.

Your life mission can also be summed up by what you do, and how it is a physical expression of who you are. So what is the story behind your mission? And, following what Jesus modeled, how does your mission reflect “the Father’s business?” The more you develop your story to understand where God is alive and active in it, the more you can come to understand and identify elements of God’s story and where that story has been enacted and activated in you. The more we learn to notice this, the better we become at seeing how our story—our life’s mission—is a part of God’s story.

STORY PROMPTS

Preface

What activity do you think is worth taking a long time to do or complete? To help answer this, consider what you could spend hours doing.

For Your Consideration

Do you find yourself open to “fermentation” style discipleship or have you preferred “quick-pickling”? Have you experienced the results of one or both of these styles? What is the difference?

Plot Points

When it comes to mission, it’s important to remember that you’re already doing it! We can revise, refine, or reinvent what we’re doing, but you’re not starting from scratch. What is your current mission? Is there anything you’d like to revise, refine, or reinvent?

What does it mean to “do the Father’s business?” Does that change how you understand what you do? Does it make you want to change anything?

The Story Continues

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What is one way your faith can act beyond the walls of your church? This week, try to make it happen.

Source: ^[1] Buehring, David. *Discipleship Journey: A Guide for Making Disciples That Make Disciple-Makers*. Oviedo, FL: Higherlife Development Services, 2011

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Session Three | VISION

"Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart." — Dallán Forgaill

"I'm not lost for I know where I am. But however, where I am may be lost." — A.A. Milne, Winnie-the-Pooh

Astronomers in the 1840s noticed that there was an unaccounted for gravitational pull in our solar system impacting the orbit of the known planets, letting them know that there was something out there to be discovered. They didn't know exactly what they were looking for, but this mysterious pull sparked curiosity and discovery. In the 1890s astronomers started looking for "Planet X." In 1930, Pluto, the planet, was discovered and believed to be the explanation for the previously unaccounted for gravitational pull. Some of us grew up learning that Pluto was the 9th and smallest planet and the missing link and answer to those previously confounding orbits. Fast forward to 1992 when additional discoveries started calling into question Pluto's planetary status, and in the mid-2000s when committees, state senates, and scientific conferences all weighed in on their opinions of the resolution determining Pluto no longer met the official definition for the term planet. The Smithsonian Air and Space Museum marked this demotion with an RIP Pluto display and students everywhere were left wondering how something as big and certain as the Solar System can change. But the Solar System didn't change, just our understanding and knowledge of it.

Knowing the full story now, at least the full story to this point, we can see the assumptions along the way that led to discoveries being understood as they were. But our vantage point now also allows us to see how each of the assumptions, however misguided they might now seem with today's information, were the catalysts to the work and the discoveries that transformed our understanding of our Solar System. Though Pluto is no longer considered a Planet, we know what we do now because of that stop along the way of learning and developing the previous understanding.

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Our mission often follows a path like Pluto, but vision acts much like that mysterious pull, leading us to action and bringing us back to the right path when our waypoints of discovery find us a bit off track. A church's vision could be expressed through the guiding questions the leadership team considers before making any decisions, short-to-mid-term plans that are more concrete, the Pastor's wildly big guiding vision that the rest of the team has rallied behind, or a dream for the impact it hopes to make in the city. Each serves as a pull toward something greater as the day-to-day decisions are made and missions are enacted. Personal vision often takes the shape of dreams, goals, or aspirations that bring you to action and align your decisions and actions. If you're not sure about your vision, have no fear; many people have not considered it in these terms, so the following prompts will guide you.

STORY PROMPTS

Preface

Describe a time in your life where you were on an adventure. What did it teach you?

For Your Consideration

Hindsight shows us that astronomers took wrong turns while seeking to explain the gravitational pull on the known planets of the solar system, yet the discovery ultimately continued in the right direction. With the same benefit of hindsight, is there a time in your life where despite "wrong turns" or decommissioned planets, your vision for the future kept you moving in the right direction? How do you explain that?

Plot Points

What goals, dreams, or aspirations do you hold? What are you working toward now? How?

How can the church help you with this?

How might your vision (goals, dreams, or aspirations) help the church?

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The Story Continues

In the mission session we were reminded that "we're already doing it!" Vision is often similar, so this week, make note of things you naturally do that further your personal vision. This can serve as a great reminder of how God wired you and how you're already doing it.

Session Four | VALUES

“Values are like fingerprints. Nobody’s are the same, but you leave ‘em all over everything you do.” — Elvis Presley

First grade teacher, Mrs. Lee, starts each school day with a class meeting where the students gather to recite the rules of their classroom. In these meetings the students remind each other that in their classroom they make mistakes and learn from them, they celebrate each other’s victories, ask for and offer help, and are safe, respectful, and responsible. Though Mrs. Lee’s class calls them rules of the classroom, they’re really the values of the classroom; the underlying principles that inform and influence how they behave and interact with one another.

We can be quick to assume the term “values” is just a synonym for what we believe, and though they’re related they are not quite the same thing. The main difference is that values are principles, ideals or standards of behavior that we act upon and our behavior reflects, while beliefs are convictions that we generally accept to be true but that might not be reinforced by our actions. It is these ingrained beliefs that influence our values, attitudes, and behavior. Moreover, though both values and beliefs impact our mission and are seen in how we discuss our vision, the makeup of our community, and the expression of our culture, our values are reflected in and expressed by who we are and what we do—they’re seen externally—whereas beliefs are internal, guiding truths.

Simply put, values are a reflection of who we are and are shown in what we do and where we hope to go. Because of this, it’s worthwhile to take time to recognize what our values are and how they’re reflected in our personal mission and vision.

Not quite sure what yours are? There are many online resources designed to help develop and define personal values that can be helpful in jumpstarting the process of determining yours.

STORY PROMPTS

Preface

If you were in charge of a classroom, what class rules would be important for you and your students to follow? What about in another workplace? At home? How are each of these similar and how are they different? Why?

For Your Consideration

What drives or motivates you?

Plot Points

Looking back over your life, what are your personal values now and how have they changed over time? Who or what has influenced them at each point?

How are your mission and vision reflective of your values? How does thinking through your values reinforce your commitment to your mission and vision? How might they become more aligned?

The Story Continues

Make a list of your personal values and at the end of each day try to remember and record actions and/or interactions that reflect each one.

Session
Five

COMMUNITY

"Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much" — Helen Keller.

Naturalist Robert MacFarlane writes, "The English Oak supports an astonishing 2300 species, of which 326 depend on it for survival. 716 lichens, 108 fungi, 1178 invertebrates, owls, bats, wood warblers, butterflies..." and continues with the assessment that when we hold an English Oak acorn, we're holding, "not a single tree, but a community-to-be, a world-in-waiting."^[1] One tiny acorn holds the future promise of an interconnected world. Like the acorn, we, too, are a single entity that, when we look a bit closer, holds the future promise of being an integral part of a robust, mutually supportive, community.

Jesus understood the power of community too. One of the first things Jesus does during his earthly ministry is build his community. He could have chosen to do everything alone, but instead, he gathered up a group to be a part of His work. Together they learned, served, and worked through disagreements and differences while following Jesus. The together part is key for us, too. There are around 50 "one another" commands in Scripture that cannot be obeyed unless we're in community. In 1 Thessalonians 2:8, Paul writes, "We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's Good News but our own lives, too." In other words, community is meant to be a place to learn and share about Jesus and one another. God exists in community (3-in-1) and created us for community, too.

Why, then, can community be so hard? In 2017, former U.S. Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy, declared we have a loneliness epidemic, with at least 40% of adults in the United States reporting that they're lonely.^[2] One reason for this could be explained by Pastor Dan White Jr's tweet from September 13, 2022, "In a consumer-oriented time it becomes utterly normal for people to demand the benefits of community without the inconvenience of commitment."^[3] When we're only pursuing community for what we can get from it and are unwilling to invest time and energy into others, too, we miss the point. We often want to belong, but forget that true, transformative relationships require mutuality, and that like the acorn, our rootedness has the potential to support not just our own growth, but the growth of many others.

Though leaning into community can be intimidating, stories help. Understanding one's own community and personal context is imperative when seeking to connect with others,^[4] because understanding your story helps you understand your life.^[5]

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And when we grow in understanding our lives it can become easier to understand others' as well.

STORY PROMPTS

Preface

What role do you typically play in community? Do you enjoy that role? Would you like to play another one?

For Your Consideration

Community is best when mutuality is practiced, but the level of commitment and vulnerability required can make it difficult. Do you have a hard time being vulnerable or struggle with the give-and-take nature of relationships? Why or why not? How have you seen mutuality practiced well?

Plot Points

What was the best team you've ever been on or group you've been a part of? What made it great?

What one or two things have kept you from joining a specific group, team, or community in the past? Would those things still give you pause now?

What do you bring to this community? How do you hope to engage?

The Story Continues

Learn more about another *Known* participant this week. Schedule a time to grab coffee or call to share a bit more of your story with one another.

Sources: ^[1] @RobGMacfarlane (Robert Macfarlane). "The English Oak (Quercus robur) supports an astonishing 2300 species, of which 326 depend on it for survival. 716 lichens, 108 fungi, 1178 invertebrates, owls, bats, wood warblers, butterflies... I hold in my hand not a single tree, but a community-to-be, a world-in-waiting." Twitter, 1 Oct. 2022, 6:55 a.m., <https://twitter.com/robmacfarlane/status/1576179079098662912?lang=en>.

^[2] Vivek Murthy, "Work and the Loneliness Epidemic," *Harvard Business Review*, September 26, 2017, <https://hbr.org/2017/09/work-and-the-loneliness-epidemic>.

^[3] @danwhitejr (Dan White Jr.), Twitter, 13 Sept. 2022, 7:29 a.m., <https://twitter.com/danwhitejr/status/1569664687834566657?ctx=HwWgsDU7fLtyMgrAAAA>

^[4] Joseph Nehemiah, *Leadership Training in the Hands of the Church: Experiential Learning and Contextual Practices in North Africa and the Middle East*. Carlisle, (UK: Langham Global Library, 2021).

^[5] Matthew Dicks, *Storyworthy: Engage, Teach, Persuade, and Change Your Life Through the Power of Storytelling*. (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2018)

Session Six | CULTURE

"If we are to preserve culture we must continue to create it." — Johan Huizinga

"It is not part of a true culture to tame tigers, any more than it is to make sheep ferocious." — Henry David Thoreau

In 2018, BBC Culture filmed the series, *Stories That Shaped the World*. One of the episodes of the series was, "The Top 10 Stories that Shaped the World," which was a list voted on by writers, critics, and academics as being the most influential and enduring works of fiction. At the top of the list was *The Odyssey*, followed by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, noted for addressing the realities of the current world while also inspiring change, and *Things Fall Apart*, which, according to one novelist, offered "a radically different 'view of Africa,'" that was true, but often missed in the colonial telling. Each book on the list acted as a mirror, reflecting the particularities of the people, time, and place the author was highlighting, bringing greater self-awareness to those centered in the story and increasing their visibility for all others. The greatest stories, however, didn't stop there; through the reflection of current culture, culture was changed and refined moving forward.

Storytelling is at the heart of culture. In fact, storytelling itself is cultural. Stories are how we share traditions and customs and pass down history to those around us. They can be shared orally, digitally, written, and through art. As people of faith, we come from a lineage of storytellers. Jesus taught using story and we've followed that model ever since. The seder, the central element of the Jewish Passover celebration is one way Jesus' cultural storytelling continues outside of Christianity. A storytelling ritual done in obedience to the instruction found in Exodus 13:8, "You shall tell your child on that day, saying, 'it is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.'" The seder is where the story of the exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt is told. During the seder they don't just tell the story, though, they also ask and answer a series of four questions and take time to discuss the importance of remembering. Similarly, during the Last Supper, Jesus instructed his disciples to remember him when they gathered for a meal, a tradition we continue when we remember during communion. Stories told over a meal allow for praise, rededication, and sharing of words, customs, and rituals that pass along the faith.

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We are all enculturated beings. Despite the ways we sometimes talk about it, culture isn't the enemy. Culture just is. It is a representation of who we are in our context, and its various expressions include customs, laws, dress, social standards, codes of conduct, and traditions. In short, culture is both a reflection of the people within the community and it informs the community of people within it. Because people grow and change, so does culture, but the community is the engine for the change, not the other way around.

We each have our own context and associated culture. We are all part of many cultures. Our families of origin have a culture, our friend group, work group, and hobby group do, too. We've picked up the culture codes of each group we're a part of through spending time and investing our energy in paying attention to what sets each group apart. If we're lucky, though, a longtime group member will come alongside us and fill us in on some of the unique context to help speed up our feelings of being part of the community and providing a stronger foundation for the rest of the things we notice as we spend time and invest energy moving forward. It's hard to feel like part of the group when you don't understand the inside jokes, backstories, or why certain things are done the way they're done. Much of this will come in time, but this session will aid the coming alongside process to help you feel like you're in the know now. From high-level information to inside jokes, this is the time to learn where the bathrooms are, how the church communicates events and other information, and why members slow-clap in response to good news.

STORY PROMPTS

Preface

What fictional universe, world, location, or culture would you most like to see become real? What do you appreciate about the culture? Do you see any similarities between what you're drawn to and your own culture(s)? Any differences?

For Your Consideration

How much do you know about your culture(s)? What encourages you to learn more and what discourages you from discovering more?

Plot Points

Of what cultures are you a part? What cultures influence you?

What role has your culture played in your story?

The Story Continues

Make a list of the various cultures you encounter this week. Are there any cultures you're part of that you hadn't considered before? Consider how this increased awareness of yourself and others impacts how you interact.

Source: "The Top 10 Stories That Shaped the World." BBC Culture. Accessed September 13, 2022.
<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20180521-the-top-10-stories-that-shaped-the-world>.

**Session
Seven****ESSENTIALS**

"Everything in life goes back to the basics." — Kron Gracie

If you Google "Packing Essentials," the search will return with countless checklists, some of which ensure you'll have everything you need to make your temporary home-away-from-home comfortable. Toothbrush, toothpaste, Band-Aids, phone charger, socks. From toiletries and clothes to first aid and electronics, these essentials lists include items from many categories and reminders to bring glasses even if you have 20/20 vision and a swimsuit even if you're traveling to places with arctic temperatures. In other words, these lists are exhaustive and suggest items that aren't necessarily essential for your needs or travel plans. But taken as a whole, these lists can be pretty helpful in guiding us through a process that is as straightforward as it is multi-layered.

Navigating church ministries, groups, and service opportunities can be a lot like these packing lists. You'll find some opportunities listed that don't fit with where you're going or your specific, personal needs, but that doesn't mean the whole list is to be ignored. Before you even look at the list, though, do you know where to go to find these opportunities? You know you can Google "packing essentials," but where can you find information about when groups start, where to meet for the service opportunity, how information is typically communicated, or who to talk to if you have questions or concerns? Now that you have a greater idea of the whys and hows of the way your church operates, this session covers the who, what, when, and where. Basically, this session is for the nuts and bolts of the church; the information that is likely available on the website but previously you might not have known to look for or even cared to know. Now that you understand the whys and hows, though, we hope you do care to learn more about the rest.

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STORY PROMPTS

Preface

If you could start or add anything at the church, what would it be? Why?

For Your Consideration

What has held you back in the past from becoming committed and invested in a new community? What can you do differently this time to overcome that hurdle?

Plot Points

What questions do you still have about the church? What questions do you have about how to engage or become involved? Do you know who to ask or where to go for information?

What are you most interested in learning about or becoming involved? What, specifically, interests you? What opportunity have you heard about that you knew immediately wasn't for you? Why?

The Story Continues

Find out more about your specific areas of interest that the church currently facilitates. You can contact the staff member or ministry lead, look on the website, or ask someone currently serving or engaged in that program how they got involved and what they get out of being a part of it.

Session Eight | ACTIVATE

"Start by doing what is necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you're doing the impossible." — Francis of Assisi

"Creativity is like a puzzle, and people contribute different pieces to create a bigger picture" — Kermit the Frog

Mario, Luigi, Princess Peach, and Yoshi are some of the most iconic Super Mario Bros. characters. In the Nintendo video games, these characters gain new abilities through accessing special power-ups. The classics are the Super Mushroom which increases the character's size, the Fire Flower that gives them greater defensive power, and the Super Star that allows the characters to become nearly invincible, and in some games, provides a speed boost. Sometimes the power-ups just appear making it almost impossible for the player to avoid them, but oftentimes players must seek them out, sometimes even removing obstacles for them to appear or become accessible. When the power-ups are activated, though, the game becomes more exciting and previously impossible levels become playable.

This session is designed to help you navigate and figure out how to access the "power-ups" your church offers. Like Mario and Princess Peach experience, some of the ministry, group, or service opportunities will seemingly find you on their own, but most will require some effort to be discovered. You might be most interested in helping where the church has the greatest need. If this is you, great! Ask how to be of service. You might be in a unique season of life that leaves you looking for a specific ministry to serve in or be served by. If this is you, incredible! Ask how to get involved. You might not be sure where the best place is to start engaging community. If this is you, wonderful! Determining your place in the church isn't a one-time thing, so figuring out how to navigate the various opportunities—knowing where to look to access the "power-ups"—is just as important as finding a specific place to land now.

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

STORY PROMPTS

Preface

What is your “secret skill?” What are you good at that people might not readily know?

For Your Consideration

Where have you already connected in the church? If you haven't joined a group, ministry, or other engagement opportunity, where do you hope to?

Plot Points

In session 1 you answered the question, “What do you hope to get out of *Known*?” At the end of the experience, have you? Did your answer change along the way?

How do you hope to impact the church? How do you hope the church impacts you?

The Story Continues

Commit to your next step. It's simple and difficult all wrapped in one action, but it's also how the foundation established in *Known* will continue to grow. You don't have to do this alone, however. Your *Connector* is here to help you, so commit to your next step and tell your connector for encouragement, help, and accountability.

Known

Tell Your Story: Session Script Builder

Story-Based, Question-Driven Prompts to Help
Your Church be *Known*

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Tell Your Story: Session Script Builder

**Story-Based, Question-Driven Prompts
to Help Your Church be
*Known***

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Let's Tell Your Story

Your church's story is still being written, but what a story you have to tell so far! Using *Known's* story based, question driven Script Builder, you'll be able to confidently share various chapters of your church's story—your culture, context, and community as seen through your mission, vision, and values—to best welcome new members into the community in which they're seeking to commit, invest, and grow. New members want to know more about your church than service times and ministry opportunities; they want to know the backstory, the stories you're writing with your congregation and in the community, and the outlines you've created for where you hope the story will go next. New members also want to know how they can become part of the story, so we'll cover that, too. In short, stories highlight what makes each church, and everyone in it, unique. Let us help you tell your story and be *Known*.

As you move through the Tell Your Story: Session Script Builder, you'll be prompted to answer session-specific questions as well as several overarching questions: What is the story we're seeking to tell; Who is the best person to tell this part of the story; and Who else do we need to ask to be able to tell the fullest story? As you answer these overarching questions for each session, consider how best to incorporate these stories and storytellers into your *Known* experience. How you've decided to run *Known* (the timeline and delivery method) will help drive your considerations and influence whose voices you bring into the process of completing Tell Your Story.

Each question is designed to help you best tell the story of your church. The questions are organized to match the 8-session design of *Known*, aligning the Story Prompts with the Session Scripts you'll use to facilitate each session as seamlessly as possible.

(Want to know how your current members would answer these questions about your church? Contact us about launching a church-wide survey designed to help you hear how *they* tell the story of your church.)

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Session One | HISTORY AND WELCOME

Session 1 focuses on introducing the facilitator and connector(s) to participants, introducing participants to each other, and introducing *Known*. People want to know that they're meeting for a purpose, with a purpose, so this session helps establish both. In groups, if you don't take time at the beginning to get to know each other, it can be difficult to backtrack and establish connections later. This night is informational and relational. Trust that there is value in this alone. This is also the session where logistics are taken care of: explain the purpose of the participant Tell Your Story guide (participants should already have access to complete the pre-session work for this week), officially create the breakout groups if you have enough participants to warrant this, and facilitate an information trade: have participants trade phone numbers with at least one other participant and a Connector, which is the participant "The Story Continues" challenge for the week.

In the large group time you'll also tell the story of your church, focusing on history and overarching organizational or unique identifying characteristics. Sharing the history establishes an understanding of the who, why, and how of the church. You can also provide history on the "big-C Church," as well, if it helps establish your culture. It provides a foundational understanding of background and highlights areas of growth and change.

Building comfort and trust is necessary to create a safe space where participants feel comfortable being known. Focusing initially on relationship building will create a strong foundation for the remaining sessions. This also is where you can exchange expectations between facilitators and participants. It helps build commitment and buy-in for the process early on. It also allows participants to feel ownership over the process and begins building a sense of belonging within the church community.

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

STORY PROMPTS

What is the story of your church?

Include brief stories of the history, people (leaders and members), mission, vision, values, and culture which will all be built upon more. Also highlight the impact you see the new members making.

What do you hope participants get out of *Known*?

Include the role of the Connectors, the importance of community building between *Known* participants, and explain the gradual transition from guided to self-directed engagement *Known* is designed to aid.

SESSION BUILDER

Using the Story Prompts answers as a guide, consider the following questions to help you develop the story that will be shared during the large group time for this session. The answer to who is the best person to tell this part of the story will likely determine your delivery method (in person, video, hybrid, panel discussion, Q&A) and any additional logistics you'll need to consider when running this session.

Primary Story Takeaway (What is the story you're seeking to tell? What story do you want *Known* participants to be able to tell after the session?):

Whose input do we need in order to tell the fullest story (For 'history,' consider founding pastors, longtime members, the church historian (official or unofficial), or lead pastor):

Who is the best person to tell this part of the story during the large group?

Associated Training and Resources

Why Storytelling?: How Changing the Metaphor Will Lead to More Engagement in Your Church

Session 1 Survey for Stakeholder Input

Session Two | MISSION

This session explores the Church's mission and covers a lot of ground. What do you believe and how is that expressed? What does your presence in the community look like? What does discipleship look like for kids? Adults? How is the church leaving a mark? This session builds on your history and sets the stage for sharing vision stories next week by sharing what you're doing now. If there are opportunities for new members to engage in anything you're sharing, make both the offer and information about where they go for next steps explicit.

This session allows the church to explain why you do what you do and how it all fits together. New members can likely find information online, so this session is more about sharing the heart behind what the church is doing than it is just listing ministry or service opportunities. By sharing the reasoning behind the mission, new members will also have a greater understanding of why they are doing what they're doing once they fully engage with the church.

It is also important to remember that new members join the church with fully formed lives, interests, and schedules, which is why it is so important to share the 'why' behind the 'what.' These stories provide the groundwork for future discipleship opportunities, highlight for participants' potential shared interests or passion areas with those already in the church, and reinforce the idea that they're bringing all of themselves to church—they don't need to be perfect or just like everyone else to have a place in your church because those already here are impacting God's Kingdom in a variety of ways.

STORY PROMPTS

What are you known for in the local community? How did this come to be? Has this always been your role or how you interact within a community? If not, what was it before? How did it evolve? How can new members be a part of this going forward?

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

What is the discipleship structure or process at your church? Tell a story about the impact of discipleship in the life of your church. How do new members get involved?

SESSION BUILDER

Using the Story Prompts answers as a guide, consider the following questions to help you develop the story that will be shared during the large group time for this session. The answer to who is the best person to tell this part of the story will likely determine your delivery method (in person, video, hybrid, panel discussion, Q&A) and any additional logistics you'll need to consider when running this session.

Primary Story Takeaway (What is the story you're seeking to tell? What story do you want *Known* participants to be able to tell after the session?):

Whose input do we need in order to tell the fullest story (consider ministry leaders, mission team participants, members who support a community cause your church has rallied behind, someone who has been helped by a ministry or service team):

Who is the best person to tell this part of the story during the large group?

Associated Training and Resources

Defining Mission, Vision, and Values: How are They Different, How are They Alike, and Why Should I Care?

Mission, Vision, and Values Alignment Check Worksheet

Session 2 Survey for Stakeholder Input

Session Three | VISION

It's not enough to share where you've been and where you are now. New members also want to know where the church is going—what is the vision for the future? Communicating this can take many shapes: sharing the guiding questions the executive team considers each time a decision for the future is made, short-to-mid-term plans that are more concrete, the Lead Pastor's wildly big guiding vision that the rest of the team has rallied behind, or a dream for the impact you hope to make in the city. This isn't meant to tie you to these plans, but it does give participants the opportunity to hear what moves the church to action and consider whether they want to get behind your vision, too.

Official vision statements are helpful (and we have a resource to help you create one if you're interested in creating one), but the purpose of this session is less about communicating a polished statement and more about sharing your goals, hopes, and what drives you as a church. Further, sharing history provides backstory, but sharing vision requires bold vulnerability. *Known* is built on both participants and the church sharing a risk/reward relationship, and this sharing helps establish that.

STORY PROMPTS

Where are you, as a church, going? What is your vision statement and how are you working to make it come to be? Tell a story about those efforts. What role will new members have in making the vision a reality?

SESSION BUILDER

Using the Story Prompts answers as a guide, consider the following questions to help you develop the story that will be shared during the large group time for this session. The answer to who is the best person to tell this part of the story will likely

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

determine your delivery method (in person, video, hybrid, panel discussion, Q&A) and any additional logistics you'll need to consider when running this session.

Primary Story Takeaway (What is the story you're seeking to tell? What story do you want *Known* participants to be able to tell after the session?):

Whose input do we need in order to tell the fullest story (consider lead pastor, student leaders, leadership board members):

Who is the best person to tell this part of the story during the large group?

Associated Training and Resources

How to Build a Mission and Vision Statement for Your Church
Session 3 Survey for Stakeholder Input

Session Four | VALUES

Values are a reflection of who we are and are shown in what we do and where we hope to go. Because of this, it's worthwhile to take time to recognize what your values are and how they're reflected in your church's mission and vision.

We can be quick to assume that “values” is just a synonym for what we believe. And though they are related, they are not quite the same thing. The main difference is that values are principles, ideals or standards of behavior that we act upon and our behavior reflects, while beliefs are convictions that we generally accept to be true but might not be reinforced by our actions. It is these ingrained beliefs that influence our values, attitudes, and behavior. Moreover, though both values and beliefs impact our mission and are seen in how we discuss our vision, the makeup of our community, and the expression of our culture, our values are reflected in and expressed by who we are and what we do—they're seen and measured externally—whereas beliefs are internal, guiding truths.

There are also times that upon closer inspection we find that our values aren't actually aligned with our stated beliefs or our mission. Sometimes our community and culture display our practiced values—those that are seen in what we say and do—but our stated values are more aspirational, based on intentions, or are vision focused, and are not seen in who we are now. While aspirational values have their place, knowing and naming your practiced values are what will be the most beneficial to new members.

STORY PROMPTS

What three words or phrases would you use to describe your church's values? How are these expressed? How did they come to be decided?

Change is inevitable, but we all have areas where we're more resistant or unwilling to change—and the same is true for your church. What are the areas you find that your church welcomes or encourages change? What are the areas where change might be seen as destabilizing or damaging? In other words, what are your church's non-negotiables when it comes to change? Conversely, where have you seen successful change happen before?

SESSION BUILDER

Using the Story Prompts answers as a guide, consider the following questions to help you develop the story that will be shared during the large group time for this session. The answer to who is the best person to tell this part of the story will likely determine your delivery method (in person, video, hybrid, panel discussion, Q&A) and any additional logistics you'll need to consider when running this session.

Primary Story Takeaway (What is the story you're seeking to tell? What story do you want Known participants to be able to tell after the session?):

Whose input do we need in order to tell the fullest story (consider lay leaders, families—both children and parents, members who might be comfortable telling hard truths, and broadly surveying church staff or overall membership):

Who is the best person to tell this part of the story during the large group?

Associated Training and Resources

Aspirational vs. Practiced Values: What is the Difference and Why Does it Matter?

Our Values: Are They Aspirational or Practiced?

Session 4 Survey for Stakeholder Input

Session
Five

COMMUNITY

Community is the core of the church. God exists in community, Jesus did ministry in community—one of the first things he did was invite people into his group—and he commanded us to go into our communities, which he defined as both immediate and broad. Jesus never intended us to imagine a building, organization, or event when we thought of “church.” Instead, it is a group of people joined together by their shared mission to love Jesus and love others. A church is a community on mission.

Community is also central to discipleship and growing to look more like Jesus. There are around 50 “one another” commands that can only be lived out in community. Love one another. Honor one another. Build up one another. Live in harmony with one another. Each of these requires us to be in community with others underscoring that community is the context in which we’re meant to live out our faith. We were created for community: a community on a mission, with a mission.

You’ve already considered the story of the mission of your church, so this session allows you to expand on the *who* behind the mission. Who leads the missions of the church? Who participates? How do you become engaged in community? Who do we celebrate and how? Who do we honor, serve, and support? When others look at us, who do they say we are? When we look around at our community, who do we say we are? What does your community look like?

STORY PROMPTS

How would you describe your church community? How does community form? How can new members become integrated into the existing community?

Community influences culture. This will be expanded on in the next session, but looking specifically at the community elements, how are people celebrated and

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

honored in your church? What does community look like at various life stages and ages?

When it comes to building community, many churches have several groups it can be helpful to know. Who are the staff members who oversee people, process, and programs that can help new members join an existing community? Most churches also have lay leaders or members who have leaned into their gift for hospitality, inclusion, or connection and are “officially unofficial” (they have relational authority without an official position) who are helpful to know. Who are they and how does a new member gain access to them? (Consider adding their name(s) and information to the [Essentials List](#) worksheet, too.)

SESSION BUILDER

Using the Story Prompts answers as a guide, consider the following questions to help you develop the story that will be shared during the large group time for this session. The answer to who is the best person to tell this part of the story will likely determine your delivery method (in person, video, hybrid, panel discussion, Q&A) and any additional logistics you'll need to consider when running this session.

Primary Story Takeaway (What is the story you're seeking to tell? What story do you want *Known* participants to be able to tell after the session?):

Whose input do we need in order to tell the fullest story (consider small group leaders and participants, youth group members, that church member who seems to know everyone and naturally makes connections and invitations):

Who is the best person to tell this part of the story during the large group?

Associated Training and Resources

Practicing the One Anothers in Community
Session 5 Survey for Stakeholder Input

Session Six | CULTURE

Culture is a reflection of the community that makes it up and it informs the community within it. Because people grow and change, so does culture—but the community is the engine for the change in culture, not the other way around. Storytelling is at the heart of culture. In fact, storytelling itself is cultural. Stories are how we share traditions and customs and pass down history to those around us. They can be shared orally, digitally, written, and through art. As people of faith, we come from a lineage of storytellers. Jesus taught using story and we've followed that model ever since.

Sharing about our culture matters, because few things make someone feel like more of an outsider than missing the inside joke, not knowing the procedure, or feeling as though they've missed something obvious. Sharing those things about your church takes the mystery out of what being part of the community really looks like. It helps ensure that the unofficial or unspoken rules of the church are conveyed, and it displays trust to the participants. By placing this in session 6, participants are more likely to have seen or experienced scenarios you discuss and have questions of their own based on personal experiences. And while this is session 6, this shouldn't be the first time they're seeing or hearing some of these things. It might be the first time they're fully explained or context has been provided, but work to infuse your church culture into each previous session, too. Consider sharing budget information (how it's allocated, what you'd do if you had more, how to give, etc.) Also consider giving a building tour, showing where trashbags, ice machines, stashes of extra bulletins, are. Like making sure a guest in your home knows what cabinet the cups are in or where the trash can is hidden, you know what your church uses and those items or places that are vital but might not seem important enough to share early. Trust me, they are.

As a reminder, culture isn't what church leadership wants it to be, it's what your members actually do and who they truly are. You can want a culture that reflects one thing, but if every member is doing something else, it's not your culture. So, when defining culture, like with naming and identifying values, it's best to start with what is, to start with reality, instead of focusing on intentions or aspirations. You

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

might think you're being a hopeful or positive leader by leaning into the aspirations, but when we say we're one thing and everyone experiences something else, at best we seem out of touch or unaware, at worst we leave people wondering if it's just them who don't get the benefit of the ultra-positive person or group we are.

This is the session that really narrows in on what makes your church unique. Do you slow-clap to show appreciation? Does your church have a blog, internal messaging board, or app that it would benefit participants to know about or join? Does everyone know to email Susan about joining a small group since they're not listed on the website? This is where you consider those things that established members of your church seem to just *know*, or intuit, but new members have no reason to assume or catch onto without help. This is the session to turn new members into insiders.

STORY PROMPTS

How do those outside your church see you? What makes your church unique? What is the origin story of this quality? How is it reflective of your church community and culture? Has it shifted over time based on your church community and culture?

How do those inside your church experience it? How would you describe your church culture? What are three things about your church culture that would be helpful for a new member to know? What are the unwritten rules or expectations or codes of conduct?

How is trust shown at your church, especially between church leadership and church members? Tell a story that illustrates how trust is given or expressed and what you saw as a result.

SESSION BUILDER

Using the Story Prompts answers as a guide, consider the following questions to help you develop the story that will be shared during the large group time for this session. The answer to who is the best person to tell this part of the story will likely determine your delivery method (in person, video, hybrid, panel discussion, Q&A) and any additional logistics you'll need to consider when running this session.

Primary Story Takeaway (What is the story you're seeking to tell? What story do you want Known participants to be able to tell after the session?):

Whose input do we need in order to tell the fullest story (consider asking people both inside and outside of your church—what is an external perception and what is the internal experience, someone who is relatively new, someone who has been around a long time):

Who is the best person to tell this part of the story during the large group?

Associated Training and Resources

Culture

Session 6 Survey for Stakeholder Input

Session
Seven

| ESSENTIALS

Knowing what they do now about the history, vision, mission, and culture of the church, many participants are likely asking, where do I fit in? or how do I want to leave my mark on this community? Spiritual gift assessments which are often used to help answer these questions can be helpful and have their place, but they typically overlook the fact that many people are well aware of who they are and what skills, interests, or talents they bring, what they might not know is how to connect that with what you offer in your church. They already know their strengths, interests, and passion areas. Help participants discern if these align with an existing ministry or discipleship program. If they do, great! If they don't, great! Help participants consider how they can become more engaged using their strengths for the church. Do they need to start a program? Does their interest area meet a need or gap the church currently has? Guide participants in connecting the dots between who they are and what the church offers and needs, and celebrate with those who have already invested in or committed to a specific area either before or during their *Known* experience. This is also a good time to remind participants of the continuing role of the Connectors and that though self-directed engagement is the ultimate goal, there are people and resources to help them get to that point in their own time.

This session allows participants to share more about themselves and begins to lay the groundwork for their transition into self-guided engagement. Specifically, this session allows Connectors and Facilitators to fill in information gaps about what the church does and doesn't provide, discuss specific, personalized interests and engagement desires, and it provides an informal opportunity for church leadership to gauge (1) what new members are looking for and (2) the unique talents, interests, and skills that are now a part of your church. Give time for Connectors to share where they serve, and consider allowing participants to also share if they're already serving somewhere. Remember that the small group time will be focused on connecting new members to teams/ministries/groups for their next steps. Tell the stories that will inspire new members to want to be part of what your church is doing.

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

STORY PROMPTS

What are the rhythms of your church? When do groups or classes launch? When can ministries be joined? Share stories of the impact each of these have had on church members. Even better, have church members share their stories directly.

How are needs, opportunities, or openings for feedback communicated? Where is the best place to go for information? What is the best method for sharing information?

SESSION BUILDER

Using the Story Prompts answers as a guide, consider the following questions to help you develop the story that will be shared during the large group time for this session. The answer to who is the best person to tell this part of the story will likely determine your delivery method (in person, video, hybrid, panel discussion, Q&A) and any additional logistics you'll need to consider when running this session.

Primary Story Takeaway (What is the story you're seeking to tell? What story do you want Known participants to be able to tell after the session?):

Whose input do we need in order to tell the fullest story (consider someone who has introduced a new ministry at church or involved church members in a cause they support outside of official church opportunities, ministry leaders):

Who is the best person to tell this part of the story during the large group?

Associated Training and Resources

Essentials Worksheet

Session 7 Survey for Stakeholder Input

Session Eight | ACTIVATE

Centered on the participants, the final session of *Known* is better understood as the official launch into the next season of the new members' engagement in the life of the church. Using conversational prompts designed to reinforce the previous sessions, the participants and Connectors will work together to make personalized plans for the participants' next steps. This should include discussion specifically about the interest area discussed during Session 7. Connectors, who will remain in their role beyond the duration of *Known*, will also use this time to establish their next relational touch point with each participant. The session ends by celebrating the unique traits and gifts represented in the group, reminding participants that through this process they are known.

The continued availability of "Connectors" to participants beyond the *Known* experience provides social continuity once *Known* is completed and aids the gradual confidence building needed for participants to step fully into self-guided engagement. It also offers past participants an easy way to ask questions that come up after the group is completed, thereby bridging the relational, engagement, and information needs that continue beyond *Known*.

SESSION BUILDER

Using the Story Prompts answers as a guide, consider the following questions to help you develop the story that will be shared during the large group time for this session. The answer to who is the best person to tell this part of the story will likely determine your delivery method (in person, video, hybrid, panel discussion, Q&A) and any additional logistics you'll need to consider when running this session.

Primary Story Takeaway (What is the story you're seeking to tell? What story do you want *Known* participants to be able to tell after the session?):

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Whose input do we need in order to tell the fullest story (consider past Known participants, both those who have struggled to invest or become committed and those who have flourished in self-directed engagement):

Who is the best person to tell this part of the story during the large group?
(Allowing the Connectors to lead the conversation could be a good way to visibly transition to them being the point of contact for next steps):

[Associated Training and Resources](#)

Connector 101

Assessment

The critical success indicators agreed upon to assess *Known* resources and the accessibility and presentation of the resources on the BeKnown.Church website were divided between one “quality” benchmark and four “success” benchmarks.

Quality Benchmark

- Receive an Ahrefs health score of 100% for the website, indicating an accessible, user-friendly site.
 - Ahrefs is an online tool used to assess the accessibility and user-friendliness of websites. The goal of a 100% health score was based upon the understanding that accessibility is an absolute requirement and not something that can be considered complete unless it is done fully. This goal informed the website’s color scheme, graphic design choices, and font size and color. Design choices were also tested on multiple formats ensuring the website was accessible for desktop, tablet, and mobile users. To make the video training accessible I provided video transcripts and the option to caption the videos. As of February 2023, BeKnown.Church received an Ahrefs health score of 100%. Ahrefs runs weekly, automatic health checks so as I make edits, updates, and add resources I will be able to continue using this benchmark to evaluate the site.

Success Benchmark

- A majority of surveyed participants of the user experience survey rate their experience as highly satisfied as indicated by a response of four or five out of five on a Likert scale.
 - I surveyed ten prototype users of *Known* resources and the BeKnown.Church website about their overall experience. 100% of respondents rated their experience as highly satisfied. The written feedback was overwhelmingly positive and the feedback I have received since administering the survey has continued to be positive. Having implemented programs like *Known* in churches of various sizes before, I know experientially that the first hurdle that must be overcome is ease of use. In other words, it does not matter how great the product might be, if it is difficult to follow or implement, it will not be used consistently if at all. Users who are highly satisfied with the user experience are most likely to take the time to truly learn about *Known* to determine whether it is a good fit for their church. The results so far have been promising, but I plan to develop an ongoing method to survey future users.
- At least 80% of surveyed participants of the user experience survey indicate that they would refer *Known* resources to a friend.
 - Of the ten prototype users I surveyed, 90% of respondents indicated they would refer *Known* resources to a friend. Referrals are the most valuable form of marketing

because of the built-in trust and buy-in referred customers bring with them.⁵ Since the survey, *Known* has been referred several times, with one referred church leader requesting to pilot *Known* at her church plant, demonstrating the power of referrals.

- At least 50% of church leaders reviewing an abbreviated *Known* study express interest in piloting *Known* at their church.
 - Of the ten prototype users I surveyed, 60% responded they would be interested in piloting *Known* and 30% responded that they might be interested in piloting the experience. Since the survey, three churches have moved beyond “expressing interest” and have officially requested to pilot *Known*. Two of these church leaders were part of the original surveyed group and one is a church leader to whom *Known* was referred. One experience is tentatively scheduled for March 2023, another for September 2023, and scheduling for the third is pending.
- Three to five ministry leaders overseeing community integration programs in their church express interest in using the resources they reviewed.
 - Of the prototype users who completed the survey only two reported their primary role as overseeing community integration programs making my initial benchmark mathematically impossible to reach. Looking at the entire surveyed group, however, 90% stated they would be interested in using *Known* resources. Though this benchmark is likely the least informative at this point, it will be one of the easiest and most important to track moving forward. A form built into the backend of the BeKnown.Church website lists all registered users and shows detailed information on their account including how frequently they access the site, their most recent access date, and the resources they have viewed or downloaded. Though views and downloads do not necessarily confirm that resources have been used, they do suggest targeted interest which will become an effective indicator of which resources, specifically, are the most helpful to users.

⁵ Steli Efti, “Why Referrals Are the Most Valuable Form of Marketing (and How to Get More),” *Forbes*, Last modified December 10, 2021, <https://forbes.com/sites/steliefti/2019/06/07/why-referrals-are-the-most-valuable-form-of-marketing-and-how-to-get-more/?sh=1758e5a11161>.

Project Launch Plan

Doctoral Project Description

NPO Statement

Despite guided assimilation processes, new church members feel abandoned when moved immediately to self-directed engagement. Providing for their unique needs increases their sense of belonging and commitment.

Doctoral Project

Known is an 8-session story-based, question-driven experience designed to build mutually committed relationships between the local church and their new members by addressing the experiential gap that exists for new members between visitor welcome approaches and established discipleship programming. Intended to replace existing integration programs, the [BeKnown.Church](https://www.beknown.church) website houses a full suite of resources to help churches launch their customized *Known* experience. Resources include an implementation guide, participant workbook, session scripts for facilitators, on-demand training videos, and an in-depth questionnaire to help church leaders tell the unique story of their church and church members.

Audience

The question-based approach of the resources allows the user to tailor the programs to fit their church culture, making them compatible in almost any context and across denominational lines. Those who would be most interested in my project, however, are ministry and lay leaders of newly planted churches, churches catering to “deconstructing” and “reconstructing” members, and those comfortable with a question-based, curiosity-focused discipleship strategy. My engagement strategy will include social media marketing and word-of-mouth sharing between pastors.

Development Plan

The following timeline details my next steps in launching *Known*.

March 2023

- A non-denominational church in Fayetteville, AR is piloting *Known*. I will participate as part of the church leadership team, gaining first-hand experience as a user developing the church’s story. This pilot version will also road-test the experience for participants, providing helpful feedback for future development of supplemental resources and edits for existing resources.

May 2023

- Build out ChurchLabs Consulting, the business-side of *Known*.

- Create an automated email campaign, moving *Known* registrants into an email marketing pipeline, aiding marketing goals, and helping build a customer base.⁶

June 2023

- Build out facilitation resources, including email templates and additional promotional and invitational materials for churches, making it easier to implement and run *Known*.
- Create participant resources, building out a more robust program than the initial launch which concentrated almost entirely on resourcing churches.

August 2023

- Automate the *Tell Your Story: Session Script Builder* to populate customized session scripts, streamlining the church's implementation process.

September 2023

- A church plant in Washington, DC has asked to use *Known* as part of their discipleship strategy.

Development Process

A form built into the backend of the website lists all registered users and shows detailed information on their account including how frequently they access the site, their most recent access date, and the resources they have viewed or downloaded. This information, paired with the initial user demographic information provided at registration, will be used to inform future iterations of *Known*.

Feedback and information received during consultation calls will also inform edits, updates, supplemental materials, and resources. Because consultation calls are not required, I will only receive feedback from a self-selected, but "bought-in" group, since they are taking the initiative to schedule a consultation. Because of this, the feedback they provide will be more likely to ensure *Known* grows to best serve those who will benefit from it most and will allow me to understand the most frequently asked questions, points of confusion, or other helpful user-experience data without having to survey users directly.

I will also survey those piloting *Known*, gaining insight into their experience implementing, launching, and running *Known*, informing my next steps in marketing and content development.

⁶ A more detailed business plan outlining marketing goals is included in the appendix.

Appendix A— Milestone 1 The NPO Charter

Personal Research Manifesto

I will not attempt to work backwards, assuming I already know the right answer, instead trusting the process, allowing discernment, surprises, and revelations along the way to guide me.

NPO Statement

When the Church reframes hospitality as assimilation, a focus on genuine relationships and discipleship is replaced by programmatic “engagement metrics” leading to disappointment and disengagement.

NPO Scope and Constraints

By the end of this doctorate program, I plan to develop an experiential program, seeking to create space for those looking for genuine relational connection and discipleship by reframing the assimilation model’s “look like us,” with the hospitality model of, “join us as together we grow toward Jesus.” I do not know exactly what the experiential element will look like so I cannot quantify the overall scope, boundaries, or cost of the final product at this point, but I intend to develop a small program in the short-term that is able to scale as needed in the longer-term.

NPO Context

My NPO ministry context includes non-denominational, mainline, and Christian non-profit faith communities seeking to build relational connections and to disciple congregants and participants who would benefit from a reimagined experiential program. Though applicable for adults of any age, it will be most effective for those in a season of transition. I plan to work across racial, cultural, and generational lines, focusing on the greater common, unifying experiences. I’m currently located in Northwest Arkansas, so this will be a hub for much of my work, but I also work with people in Washington, DC, New York City, and Portland, hoping for a broader geographical application.

Root Causes

A root cause of my NPO is the Church’s misunderstanding of hospitality, leading to its reframing as assimilation (or controlled hospitality). This reframing replaces the natural outcomes of hospitality—relationship and discipleship—with “engagement metrics” of assimilation, including Sunday attendance, serving, and participation on a mission team or in a small group, which are presented as false equivalents to relational discipleship. This leaves those who follow the assimilation path still yearning for promised goals that are often not realized.

The reframing to assimilation shifts the focus away from Jesus by instead creating the need to ensure everyone looks the same. This ignores the teachings of Imago Dei and falsely assumes that discipleship is linear. Because of this, a focus on assimilation disallows individuality, unique

discipleship journeys, or the work of the Holy Spirit. It instead measures success by conformity, rooted in a misunderstanding of scripture as transactional instead of relational.

Discovery Workshop Stakeholders

The stakeholders in my discovery session included a retired family ministry/adult discipleship director, teacher, small group director, therapist, pastor/spiritual director/missionary, and college professor.

One-On-One Interviews

My one-on-one interviewees included a workplace discipleship director/pastor, non-profit leader, and urban small group pastor/'connections team' lead.

3-5 Key Biblical Texts

I will explore scripture that discusses the practice of hospitality (Leviticus 19: 33-34, Luke 14, Romans 12:13-20), the idea of Imago Dei (Genesis 1:27), and the role of relationships in Jesus' life and ministry.

Academic Resources

Theologians writing about the intersection of the Divine's hospitality and how we can practice it include T.D. Alexander, Luke Bretherton, and pastor Verlon Fosner. Some primary voices looking at the negative impact of trading assimilation for relationship include theologians Sarah Bessey, Kate Bowler, Barbara Brown Taylor, and French author Albert Memmi. I will also research theories on discipleship, how people make relational connections, and the connections between the two. I'd also like to understand the historical and cultural process of shifting from a practice of hospitality to assimilation in the church.

Appendix 1

Discovery Workshop Description

My discovery workshop was held on Zoom on October 24, 12-3pm and followed the workshop plan directed in the DMin 750 syllabus. We used Zoom as our platform for discussion and Google Docs for sharing information, taking two short breaks during our three-hour session. The initial statement the participants received in advance and worked from was, *Pervasive Cultural Christianity—affiliation primarily for social capital—reduces opportunities for authentic relationship with others and increases the felt need for spiritual connection to God typically found in spiritual formation*. The following people attended:

- Retired Family Ministry/Adult Discipleship Director

- Teacher
- Small Group Director
- Therapist
- Pastor/Spiritual Director/Missionary
- College Professor

Discovery Statement

Since participants spanned two continents, five states, and represented various racial, cultural, relational (married, single, parents), sexual identity, and generational groups, we started with a prayer for unity and an icebreaker to build team cohesion. Then, to set the tone of the workshop, I shared that the starting statement was my hypothesis, and that the participants' job was to test it, pick it apart, and help me refine or restate it, encouraging openness and creating a place where a spectrum of opinions were encouraged and valued. We completed activities designed to define the issue, determine who is impacted and how, identify cultural issues to be considered, and establish the root cause of the issue. We consolidated our findings in the following discovery statement:

Considering lay leaders working with people in a season of transition

we've discovered an elevation of assimilation above relationship (with God or other people) as a marker of success

which is caused by a distorted version of the gospel needing to be affirmed and fed to survive.

If solved, it would mean increased comfort with authenticity, vulnerability, and questions as we strive to grow more like Christ than like each other.

I then opened the discussion back up, asking participants if this matched what they heard, what was still missing, and if there was anything else we needed to consider. I then closed our session letting everyone know I would follow up with an overview email seeking any additional thoughts they had after the session ended.

Key Insights from Discovery Workshop

The workshop revealed that everyone resonated with the negative impact of gospel distortions, but "cultural Christianity" is just a single, regionally specific, version. To understand the full impact, I need to expand my scope. Expanding the discussion highlighted the fact that the specific expression of gospel distortion wasn't the felt issue, but was instead the need for assimilation they all trigger. When assimilation—look and think like us—becomes the church's de facto goal, relationships and discipleship suffer.

I was surprised to find how universal the experiences were, with each participant sharing their own story of the negative impact of assimilation attempts by people or churches who pursued a distorted version of the gospel. The hopefulness created by comfort with “messy” relationships, however, was encouraging.

One-On-One Interview Discoveries

Each interviewee started by expressing their agreement with the general assertions of the Discovery Statement, but then each one expressed a slightly different understanding of the meaning of “assimilation,” highlighting the varying ways in which the word and idea are used in the church context. They specifically addressed the idea that assimilation has both individual and systemic implications, suggesting the importance of looking at them both. All three shared personal stories of the negative relational and discipleship impact of assimilation, with the common theme being, “I tried to do it the way I was told, and it still didn’t work how the church said it would.” They also all expressed a concern about the future of the church if genuine relationships and discipleship failed to become as important as “engagement metrics” and other false markers of connection.

Synthesis

Both the Discovery Workshop and 1X1 interviews exposed the universal experience of disappointment when expectations of genuine relationship in the church are instead met with attempts at assimilation. The workshop revealed assimilation as the church’s concerning answer to relationship building and sustainment, while the 1X1 interviews deepened the understanding of how wide-reaching those efforts are and called out the assumed (but largely false) outcome, that controlled engagement efforts would naturally lead to genuine relationship. When people are reluctant or unwilling to assimilate, they’re completely shut out. One 1X1 interviewee expressed the positives of assimilation efforts, but real relationships aren’t often part of the benefit.

In what I believe to be an attempt at true hospitality, the church has instead skewed its efforts toward assimilation. The church’s emphasis on assimilation (also known by church synonyms: culture, value, norms) is largely driven and measured by a focus on “engagement” metrics, pushing those to the forefront over relationship. This is problematic because people engage in the assimilation process because they’re told that is where they’ll find relationships and discipleship opportunities. The metric-driven focus is misaligned, however, with the implied relational outcome, leading to disappointment, disengagement, and missed opportunities for genuine relationships and discipleship.

Next Steps

One of the common themes I uncovered was the importance of semantics, or assumed definitions, specifically related to the word “assimilation.” I’d like to look into what assimilation means in theory and practice in churches, and, if possible, what it is understood to mean outside of that space. Based on those findings, I’d like to explore the relationship between assimilation and hospitality,

and the impact each of those has—together and separately—on forming relationships and discipleship practices.

Discovery Workshop Documentation

I met with over Zoom with six stakeholders for a discovery workshop on October 24, 2020, for a discussion centered around the statement:

Pervasive Cultural Christianity—affiliation primarily for social capital—reduces opportunities for authentic relationships with others and increases the felt need for spiritual connection to God typically found in spiritual formation.

This is the starting statement developed for my NPO Discovery Plan, providing the framework for defining what my Need/Problem/Opportunity (NPO) focus will be for my DMin project at Portland Seminary. I facilitated the stakeholders during our session through activities designed to define the issue, determine who is impacted and how, identify cultural issues to be considered, and establish the root cause of the issue. At the end, we consolidated our findings in a simplified discovery statement.

Determining the audience was difficult as this topic has broad reach, but ultimately the stakeholders defined the *primary audience* as Christian lay leaders working with those going through a time of transition. It is believed that though everyone is seeking authentic relationships, we're most aware of the presence or absence of them, and most likely to pursue establishing relationships during times of transition, making people going through a time of transition our secondary audience. Christian lay leaders were specified because of their proximity to those seeking relationship and as those typically on the frontlines, engaging in church-wide efforts. Though not the primary audience, I was encouraged to keep in mind those who have been hurt by the church after following the "rules" or "programs" promised to lead to relationships as I pursued my NPO.

The second activity the stakeholders completed was the "Empathy Map," which highlighted the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of those seeking relationship and discipleship in church. *Symptoms* expressed by placing ourselves in their shoes include: questioning whether they belong, who they can trust, the authenticity of the church and those with whom they're interacting, and a desire to understand and be a part of the church. They begin to understand interactions are transactional, causing feelings of loneliness, being guarded, and recognizing they're not allowed to express genuine emotions, thoughts, or questions, ultimately leading to people leaving or "checking out" (leaving mentally, but not physically).

Through the 5 WHYS exercise, we discussed the *root causes* of the symptoms, including:

- People are missing out on the types of relationships they want and need and were promised through the church,
- They're experiencing a disconnect between what they expected from the church and what they actually got,

- They were promised one thing (acceptance, love, belonging) and instead got the opposite (shame, judgement, control),
- Cultural Christianity is a distortion of the gospel and needs to be fed to survive,
- It can be narrow and strong and needs to be affirmed. Cultural Christianity has been normalized and justified current ways of thinking. It distorts the gospel and offers a counterfeit option,
- We're looking for acceptance/power/standing/control in earthly places,
- We have an inherent need to belong, but because it is a distorted version of the gospel, we quickly realize "the emperor has no clothes,"
- We lack unity as a Church, so we feel comfortable accepting and rejecting based on preference both as the Church and the attendee. When this happens, we build our own version (distortion) and must find people to support that (assimilation).

If we were able to address the root causes, the group hopes we'd see the following:

- People will ask more questions,
- There is an understanding there is no "one right/clear answer",
- It will be messier, but it will also be more authentic,
- We'll strive for diversity, keeping an eye out for cultural expectations that could otherwise form without us noticing,
- We accept who people are,
- We recognize and celebrate that people are not monoliths,
- We'll have deeper conversations that focus less on culture and more on discovering the individual call of who we're supposed to be and how we can each support that in each other.

There were three main NPO themes discovered:

- Cultural Christianity is just one version/expression of gospel distortion
- Assimilation is the means for preserving and supporting the specific gospel distortion
- When we over-program we become uncomfortable with mess, but authenticity and a communal appreciation of the individual is key for genuine relationships and discipleship

The culminating NPO Statement we developed was:

Considering lay leaders working with people in a season of transition

we've discovered an elevation of assimilation above relationship (with God or other people) as a marker of success

which is caused by a distorted version of the gospel needing to be affirmed and fed to survive.

If solved, it would mean increased comfort with authenticity, vulnerability, and questions as we strive to grow more like Christ than like each other.

Based on this, my updated NPO is: When the church elevates assimilation to further gospel distortions, relationships between God and others and discipleship is sacrificed as the focus shifts from “walk with us as we grow together toward Jesus” to “look like us.”

ACTIVITY #1 NPO DEFINITIONS

STARTING NPO: Pervasive Cultural Christianity—affiliation primarily for social capital—reduces opportunities for authentic relationship with others and increases the felt need for spiritual connection to God typically found in spiritual formation.

1. What is the key issue we are trying to address and why is it important?

- The primary issue seems to be identifying and overcoming the barriers to authentic relationship and connection to God. The relative importance of these two issues is determined by how they relate to the ultimate issue of authentic Christianity.
- The primary issue I understand is there is a lack of authenticity in relationships towards others and an increased felt need for a connection with God. Pretty much, isn't this up with unhealthy relationships with others and God.
- What is meant by authentic relationship? Is there overlap? If what was does cultural Christianity reduce the opportunities for authentic relationship? Explore an egoistical/individualistic lens of cultural Christianity vs an outward focus.
- The primary issue that I understand is the need for relationship and connection, and how Pervasive Cultural Christianity impedes this need and reduces opportunities.
- A primary issue seems to be the need to identify what cultural Christianity looks like in different communities/regions/countries and how that impacts people's ability to build relationships in their community, or if it decreases their opportunities for authentic relationships, and with God.
- Patterns/Commonalities:** need for definitions - are they the same? Are they different? Deficit model- different words used to describe what is missing in relationships and connection. Due to CC: 2 ways - authentic relationships are w/ God - 2 streams - they're connected - how do we reflect that?
- Difference/Outliers:** American culture vs christian culture.
- Distinguishing between what is american culture and Christian culture.

2. Who is it for?

- Church & Ministry & Group Leaders - seeking multiculturalism and diversity
- Parents
- Seekers & those questioning faith
- Emerging adults charged with making faith their own
- Church leaders, teen leaders, college leaders, worship leaders, people who have left the church; anyone wanting authentic relationship with others and God. Parents to help their children learn how to have authentic relationships.
- Anyone seeking to grow spiritually and/or seeking to journey with/encourage others in the spiritual formation process. The disillusioned. Those outside church culture who experience God in other ways beyond church culture.
- People hurt by the inauthentic relationships that that happen in the church
- People who are already associated with the church. People who grew up in church culture.
- The disaffected, disenfranchised, disillusioned
- Practitioners providing spiritual direction, teaching, pastoring, counseling
- Disciples undergoing discernment
- Parents

- Congregant leaders (small groups, Sunday School teachers etc.)
- Those who feel left-out, unwanted or shunned from the church
- Pastors "official" leaders in the church
- Church members/ those who attend on a regular basis
- Parents/ College aged students
- Those who attend only on "cultural holidays" (Christmas/ Easter)
- Patterns/Commonalities:** anyone in leadership, parents, those inside the church, those outside church culture, those hurt by the church culture
- Difference/Outliers:** Those not really engaged/lost down either way
- Core group?** Those who have left the church (because those still in haven't felt the need to leave...), those who don't yet know they're in surface level relationships, those who want authentic, those who have diverged for various reasons - Those who have rejected cultural Christianity BUT are those who are looking for relationship with God.
- Core audience?** Church leadership, young adults/times of transition, those hurt. Small group leaders, start young, established leaders - lay leaders, need to be observant to culture

3. What sociocultural factors shape this NPO?

- The current state of political discourse and identification
- Consumerism
- Hyper individualism
- The technological moment
- Rise of conspiracy theories and anti-intellectualism
- Divisions among professing christians
- Isolationism
- The current view of Christianity and Evangelicals in America
- Polarization of everything - Politics, Social issues
- Racial injustice conversations and where the Church sits
- Stigma around mental health and needing help; fear of judgment from other Christians if you have doubts/questions/issues with the church, politics and how you're supposed to "vote" and feel about certain issues; fear of being let down
- Political party differences. Theological knowledge trumping practical application/Bible study vs practical application
- The mantle view of what it means to be Christian, or variations thereof
- Combining faith and politics
- We're (Western culture) based on an individualistic culture pattern and are achievement based
- Ethnicity, american culture, family culture, political culture
- Patterns/Commonalities:** politics, polarization, "supposed to" - what we're to do, what it's supposed to look like, what the outcome is supposed to be, pre-determining and product "teaching to the test." "This is what it looks like in American cultural Christianity to be doing it "right".
- Difference/Outliers:** social media is a carrier of culture; race/ethnicity/racial conversation - possibly the interplay between them (impact of church background); what impact does denominational preference/comfort have? but will need to narrow down. Lack of trust in the work coming out of seminaries

4. What evidence do you have that this is worth the investment?

- My own spiritual life/health
- They spiritual life/health of those I love

- We were created for community because we were created by a Trine God. My mental and emotional health is enhanced greatly by authentic community. My spiritual growth is enhanced by authentic community. My ability to be of practical help to the marginalized is enhanced by community
- The hurt of not having authentic relationships, but then once you can find authentic relationships the effort is worth it. The fulfillment of finally having authentic relationships with people and God.
- Trouble finding a church and a community to belong to/feeling belonging after spending a lifetime in church
- Awkwardness in actively partnership with other churches in discipleship programming and mission opportunities.
- Commonalities/Themes:** we've experienced it -
- Sociocultural:** more people feeling like they actually belong, whatever that looks like for them; less loneliness, greater pensiveness of communities practicing healthy, authentic forms of following Jesus (less fundamentalism), less judgment, a more unified church - modeling a bridging of diversity in thoughts and beliefs; individuals and local churches be able to rest in assurance that they're part of the larger God story - surrounded by a community, more people to have hands that help them make sense of daily life. Do You Feel Loved? More yeses than nos. Finding community amongst diversity - appreciating it.

5. Can you think of this NPO in a different way? Can you reframe it?

- Reassurance of one's own individuality so not looking to social capital for validation in the first place

ACTIVITY #2	EMPATHY MAP	FEELS?
<p>STARTING NPO: Pervasive Cultural Christianity—affiliation primary for social capital—reduces opportunities for authentic relationship with others and increases the felt need for spiritual connection to God typically found in spiritual formation.</p> <p>SAYS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cut the bullshit• I don't know who to trust• Do I belong here?• So what do you all think about...• Why is it done this way?• Where can I find my people?• Hm. That's interesting.• How do you all do community here?• How can this be right? How can that be wrong?• There is no place for me here. This exactly what I expected from the church.• Community is a facade, doubt about authenticity, belonging, themselves and others; trying to get by of the last; searching and longing• Relationships, "This is exactly what I expected from the church". <p>THINKS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I want to be accepted• Will being a part of this help me in some way?• Why don't I feel like I fit in?• I want to find people who understand me.• No one here really understands me.• Does anyone care about me?• How do I find connection here?• What are you thinking about me?• Can I live with the fact that I don't believe in the same things? Is the give and take worth it?• I don't know if I can trust you and I don't know who to trust• What's wrong with me?• Does everyone feel like this?• What is this going to cost me?• How can I go back?• What will I get out of this?• What will others, especially those I value the most, think of me if I go this way?• (See above) OR what will they think of me if I DON'T go this way?• I'm never going to find connection socially or spiritually.• Community is a facade, longing, wanting to belong, looking for relationships, mind reading - assumptions, observing and evaluating others and your own options.• Relationships, What will it cost me? What will I get out of it? I've had this before, how can I get it again? - and then how do we respond when we get it? I don't get it again? there isonus on me to keep going back to build independence community. Can I take any more of the surface level stuff? Nostalgia can be a problem - we can't live up to the perfect or recapture what never was. (Time can distort our memories of how we did this before) (transactional and relational terms considered)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Misunderstood• Lonely• Disconnected• Searching• Lost• "Cancelled"• Unable to express negative emotions• Cautiously excited• Confused• Angry• Why is there no room for racism?• Something is wrong with me• Lost, limited, judged, angry, judged• Relationships, nothing positive, guarded - not sure what to say/hot say, don't feel known• Relationships, where might approach as "what's wrong with them?" instead of "what's wrong with me?" (Sometimes asking and working through "what's wrong with me" is a stepping stone to seeing the cultural issues) <p>DOES?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Asks questions to try and find points of connection• Tries a few times to find connection/relationship and then stops• Tries to conform in order to be accepted• Seeks to be thoughtfully "correct" within the group so they will be accepted• Goes but leaves quickly - doesn't engage• Drops out of existing groups, disconnects• Reads, listens, observes (often from a distance/anonymously)• Checks out• Questions• Challenges, observes• patterns/communities: questioning, leaving, distance yourself before you leave.• Different/outlier: checks out (you're still there physically but not mentally)• (both healthy and unhealthy responses here - asking and evaluating vs. conforming)• (Often people are questioning, we need to be aware, celebrating, and addressing them)• Repeat/ask across all quests? Questioning, feeling vulnerable, weighing options, safety ("am I safe" - precursor to vulnerability).	
	OVERALL	<p>Authenticity in one quest? Not a lot of positive expectations, cynical desire to withdraw/leave/evaluate, number of times you've heard it and likely impact for cautious optimism vs. jaded response, apathy stage can play into it, cynicism sets in after the first time you've been burned, is there a gender-specific element? Negative experiences as early as middle school can lead down this road to cynicism - can experience in social groups in general, but when do they happen in Christian circles? Especially when we've been promised they will deliver on community, belonging, etc.</p>

ACTIVITY #3	5 WHYS
<p>STARTING NPO: Pervasive Cultural Christianity—affiliation primarily for social capital—reduces opportunities for authentic relationship with others and increases the felt need for spiritual connection to God typically found in spiritual formation.</p> <p>WHY 1 Because many people live who true connection with others and with God.</p> <p>WHY 2 they are more focused on acceptance and/or rejection than living "honesty" into who they really are</p> <p>WHY 3 We were made for community by a triune God so we will either seek community through conformity or reject community before it has a chance to reject us</p> <p>WHY 4 we fear we are not worthy of unconditional love and acceptance</p> <p>WHY 5 guilt (true guilt and false guilt) and shame manifest early in our lives (doctrine of original sin)</p> <p>WHY 1 Because people are lonely and missing out on authentic relationships with others and God</p> <p>WHY 2 They're missing out because they don't know if they're allowed to be authentic and what it will cost them</p> <p>WHY 3 They wonder if the cost of not fitting in will be too much and they'll be isolated/distracted</p> <p>WHY 4 if they're out, they will be unhappy and unfulfilled emotionally, spiritually, etc.</p> <p>WHY 5 People engage in cultural Christianity because they fear it's too dangerous emotionally, mentally, and/or spiritually not to (they give up on it when they realize either that it's not too dangerous or they can't take the impacts of inauthenticity anymore)</p> <p>WHY 1 There is a significant disconnect between the message of the Gospel and it's related promised and the lived experience of the "average" American protestant Christian</p> <p>WHY 2 The lack of the of a clear understanding of the message of the nature of proper response</p> <p>WHY 3 Humans are messed up, or as Francis Spufford says, suffer from the HPFIFU</p> <p>WHY 4 Ask God</p> <p>WHY 5 That's the only place I know to get sufficient answers</p> <p>WHY 1 This is a need because people go to church environments to find relationships and others who have the same belief/value system that they have and when they don't find it...</p> <p>WHY 2 It leads to an inaccurate view of Church and what we're called to be! how we're called to act.</p> <p>WHY 3 This turns people off from both Church and God</p> <p>WHY 4 If people are turned off from Church and God, then God is not longer relevant culturally or personally</p> <p>WHY 5 Ultimately, God is lost, (the need being keeping God alive and relevant and our relationships with Him and one another flourishing)</p>	<p>WHY 1 (Laura said so and...) Because church promises to guide people towards both authentic community and spiritual connection with God yet still fail short</p> <p>WHY 2 Argument on the interpretation of that guide (aka Bible)</p> <p>WHY 3 We bring in our personal experiences and cultures into our interpretation</p> <p>WHY 4 Culture is so dominant in our lives and how we interpret others</p> <p>WHY 5 Not truly taught how to accept other lens and perspectives</p> <p>WHY 1 Why are we having this conversation? Because it matters and to hopefully grow from</p> <p>WHY 2 Because there is a need for change</p> <p>WHY 3 To embrace the hurt and division</p> <p>WHY 4 Get back to the root of christianity</p> <p>WHY 5 Truth and light</p> <p>Group Whys</p> <p>WHY 1: People are missing out on the types of relationships they want and need and were promised through church</p> <p>WHY 2: Experiencing a disconnect between what they expected from church and what they actually get</p> <p>WHY 3: They were promised one thing (acceptance, love, belonging) and instead got the opposite (shame, judgment, control).</p> <p>WHY 4: Cultural Christianity is a distortion of the gospel and needs to be fed to survive. (can be narrow and strong and needs to be affirmed. Cultural Christianity has been normalized and justifies current ways of thinking. It distorts the gospel and offers a counterfeit option.)</p> <p>WHY 5: We're looking for acceptance/power/standing/control in earthly places/We... It is the human potential to F things up (HPFIFU).</p> <p>We're trying to fulfill our needs on our own. BUT: Alone, we cannot fulfill our needs. We need God and others. We're looking for acceptance</p> <p>Pattern of distortion - But people realize the emperor has no clothes.</p> <p>We have an inherent need to belong, but because it is a distorted version of the gospel, "You can't just deliver good news for yourself."</p> <p>Early church more unified in approach, but we've moved to a very divided approach</p> <p>Now you either accept or reject, but even if you reject, temptation is to build your own version</p>

One-Page Post-Workshop Message to Stakeholders

Workshop Stakeholders,

Thank you so much for giving your time and insights to help with my project. It means a lot to me and I loved having everyone in the same Zoom!

We filled in the blanks with (1) who I'm "targeting" with my help, (2) what the NPO is at its base level (3) what causes it and (4) what it would mean if it was solved. We came up with the following:

Considering lay leaders working with people in a season of transition, we've discovered an elevation of assimilation above relationship (with God or other people) as a marker of success, which is caused by a distorted version of the gospel needing to be affirmed and fed to survive. If solved, it

would mean increased comfort with authenticity, vulnerability, and questions as we strive to grow more like Christ than like each other.

Is this what your takeaway from Saturday was, too? If not, what part(s) am I misstating or missing nuance? I feel like one of my takeaways was that this is an issue that is difficult to distill into a single focused sentence, so this is as narrow and specific as I was able to make it. Help me out if you think I'm missing something.

Not only is there room to correct my summary of our time together, but if there are things you've thought of since that you think would be valuable—let me know.

I'm so grateful to each of you and appreciate you sharing your expertise and your experience with me.

One-On-One Interview Documentation

INTERVIEW A NOTES (MENTOR/WORKPLACE DISCIPLESHIP DIRECTOR/RURAL PASTOR/CHURCH PLANTER):

- If “assimilation” means “be more like us” instead of “be more like Jesus?” “I agree with the whole concept.”
- Questions about inclusion of “season of transition” – “oh, that makes a lot of sense. It’s an important designation because people are more susceptible then.”
- Churches create an unhealthy dependence.
 - Multi levels of “feeding”
 - Assimilation needs to be affirmed – “they need *their* understanding of the gospel to be true!”
 - “I don’t disagree with your NPO statement at all.”
- Recommended Reading: Barbara Brown Taylor, *Learning to Walk in the Dark* – “unpacks all the things God did in the dark. Dark isn’t bad!” “Makes me think of people on the porch under the light yelling, ‘don’t go out in the dark! It’s scary out there.’ We have Solar People and Lunar People, and the Solar People in the church are terrified of what the Lunar People might reveal. There is no need to fear the dark.”
- With more assimilation you have more conformity. But what happens to those who don’t/won’t conform?
- Should doubt be included in the “if solved” part? If pull of assimilation is addressed, people will be more comfortable with their own and others’ doubt.

- "I can tell an interview is going well when people bring up doubts."
- We're always asking ourselves: 'What's required to be assimilated and when am I out?' 'What patterns do we see these assimilators are willing to walk?' 'When do they put the blame on the one looking for community instead of looking at themselves?'
- It happens at both the systems and the individual level - addressing just one won't fix the other.
- "When I was pastoring, I was like Paul. I had the credentials of Paul in the Nazarene church. But even with those, it got to the point they were tired of me and my questions."
 - Questions were heard as challenges. Doubts were used to push out. Actually meant as efforts to understand and go deeper, but not taken as efforts against people and the church.

INTERVIEW B NOTES (COLLEGE AND COMMUNITY-FOCUSED NON-PROFIT LEADER):

- "On the right track"
- Check out Anthony Bradley - there is a growing group of African Americans who feel like they need to divorce evangelicalism
- As a woman of color, there is no place within the scope of the evangelical church
 - The intersectionality: WOC/POC/Woman leads to erasure
- White women are lifted up as examples of Christian women so "'black power' men" end up marrying white women because they're the example
- Willingness to have various people around makes a huge difference - when we're willing to truly listen to different voices and experiences it opens us up to a bigger story
- Tendency to assimilate into the majority culture even in the church means majority culture is determining the direction, not Jesus
- "Black people don't assimilate." So, what exists for us?
- Trump was the lynchpin. "You cannot tell me Donald Trump isn't a racist. I don't care how good he is for your taxes. As a church when do we say enough?! This is what is right in the eyes of God?!"
 - Somewhere there has been a connection made between God and country. Patriotism warped Christianity.

- “We have made Christianity something to be attained....” It’s partisan, turns people off from the gospel because we ‘ve made the gospel in our own image instead.
- “It all reeks of privilege.”/” it’s crazy”/” it’s been hard for me to watch. It makes me really angry, but I don’t want to live in that space.”
- How can we say “we are the body of Christ” yet shun social justice? Jesus was all about restoring people and a place of justice.
- We want to think it can be fixed if we just come together because we both love Jesus. But it’s not that easy. We need to go back and make things right.
- We’ve got to get to the place where people step up and say ‘this isn’t right. Where is the church?!”
- We need to stop excusing “that’s just how he/it is. No! It’s how we’ve made it and allowed him/it to be!”
- Globally, now, we’re racially mixed. If we have a hope of the next generation loving God, we have to get it right.
- We need generational awareness. Millennials and younger will not exist in any organizational structure where justice is not a priority.
- We need to break down the idea of the monolith! We need to tell stories. Family trees tell stories. Cannot assume everyone who isn’t like us is one dimensional, but we get to be complex and nuanced.
- “We cannot keep lifting up ‘this perfection is God’s perfect plan for you’ even if the Bible doesn’t say that. There is no perfect family.” Another example of changing scripture to fit what we want it to say/fit our ideal picture
- Been wrestling with the idea of reparations – how do we restore justice and order without addressing income gaps/other social issues? How do we do this without creating systems of equity? Otherwise, the same groups of people will always be ahead. How do we restore? Even in the bible they pay people back, so today what is the role of the church?
 - ME: Look into year of jubilee

INTERVIEW C NOTES (URBAN SMALL GROUP PASTOR/FORMER ‘CONNECTIONS TEAM’ LEADER FOR LARGE MULTISITE CHURCH):

- There are Layers to discuss because haven’t seen/heard a connection between assimilation and relationships. Typically, the metrics are assimilation and engagement.

- What are the differences between “engagement” and “relationship?” Do we treat them as the same in the church?
- “C did everything the church said to do to find relationship, but never did. She joined a group, she served the church, she went on a mission trip, and never found relationship.”
 - Shows the importance of looking at real relationships vs. engagement
- Another person said, “I’ve done what I’m supposed to, and nobody came through.”
 - “connection” vs. “relationship” is very important
- “Church A” valued a spectrum of opinion – they saw the beauty of the spectrum.
- “Church B” – culture is centered around shared norms and values. The goal is to take people from 3 different churches (and other places) with 3 different value structures and get people to the center. If people aren’t open to or don’t agree with the center culture at Church B, say, “if this isn’t a good fit, there are other choices/churches.”
- There is both beauty and potency diversity.
 - There is value in people coming together around a shared thing or a shared essential. Like a mission trip mentality. “We can all love the whole world, but if you’re on this team, you better have a special love for Jordan.”
 - My question: Is this a both/and situation? Is there a line that you can cross between beauty and potency? Is it a gray area thing or black and white idea?
 - “It probably is a black and white thing, ultimately. How it manifests is where diversity comes in, the values that need to be shared.”
- Even for churches to be racially diverse, the core service elements need to be rethought so people feel welcome.
- The differences between inside and outside perspective of a church’s culture can make a difference in expectations and satisfaction.
 - Example: church A is thought to be a “praying church” but insiders know it’s a “missions church.” If one only knows it’s a “missions church” after being assimilated, those who wanted to be a part of a “praying church” will be disappointed. Meanwhile, those who would want a “missions church” would miss out on trying church A because they’re not drawn to what the perception of the church culture is. ME: So, what is the role of church culture in all of this?
- Should approach with the lens of a practitioner – “this is essentially a discipleship pathways conversation starting further back”

- “You can find something that is deeply true, but how do you mobilize the church around it?”
- Church C puts on a conference each year looking at church attendance, using metrics of group participation, tithing, service, and missions as “engagement predictors” – but the predictive power for attendance isn’t the same as relationship or discipleship or forming.
 - Why are they being treated as the same?
 - What are the unique metrics for relationships?

POST INTERVIEW THOUGHTS/NOTES:

- Systemic and Individual causes and implications. Cannot address one in isolation and expect holistic change.
- Assimilation is often expressed as conformity – but what happens to those who don’t or won’t conform? What space exists for them?
 - Assimilation also couched in terms of “culture” “values” “norms” – some of that is needed, but can it be expressed through hospitality a bit differently?
- No room for individual experiences or stories. (ME: What would happen if that changed? How could that change?)
- “Tired of me and my questions. There was no place for me in the church.” and “With the intersectionality of WOC/POC/Women, there is no place for me in the church” and “I’ve done what I’m supposed to do, and nobody came through.” How have we gotten to a place where people feel there is no place for them in the church?! (pastor, Christian parachurch ministry leader, new Christian, people seeking truth and engagement being pushed out???)
- If they don’t look like us, we push them out? Afraid of challenging thoughts? Can our faith not withstand thoughts?
- Is Assimilation just hospitality gone askew? But the few degrees off shift the outcome from relationship to programs and metrics. So instead of leading to discipleship, they lead to obedience?

Appendix B– Milestone 2 NPO Topic Expertise Essay

Introduction

Providing a welcoming atmosphere that ensures people know they belong is the initial goal of most churches. When done well, personal spiritual growth and engagement within the church and broader community will flourish. When the Church reframes hospitality and inclusion as assimilation, however, a focus on genuine relationships and discipleship is replaced instead by programmatic “engagement metrics” shifting both the outcomes for the church and the perception of belonging by those with whom the Church is seeking to connect. This paper explores the biblical, historical, and contemporary literature which discusses the original understanding of hospitality and inclusion contrasted with current assimilation practices, and the varying outcomes the divergent trajectories lead to despite both starting from a similar place of desiring to communicate belonging.

Section 1: Biblical and Theological Foundations

Hospitality, Inclusion, and Assimilation in the Biblical World

Hospitality and inclusion are practiced throughout the Bible, albeit differently than we see today. This section will examine these themes throughout, highlighting several scripture passages that express the development of hospitality practices, the expression of inclusion, and the underlying and interwoven importance of the understanding of *imago Dei* for each. This section will also explore the role of relationships in Jesus’ life and ministry, providing a foundation for a biblical understanding for the relational implications of hospitality—defined here as turning strangers into guests⁷—and the next step of turning a guest into an active participant (the step that often informs the assimilation practices in the Church today) in discipleship and faith engagement.

Biblical Textual Discussions

UNDERSTANDING IMAGO DEI: GENESIS 1:27

To grasp the biblical themes of hospitality, inclusion, and assimilation, we must first understand the importance of the idea of *imago Dei* (Latin for, “image of God”).⁸ The first chapter of the Bible centers around the creation story, with special attention given to humans being created in the image, or likeness, of God; “God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God

⁷ Lee Roy Martin, “Old Testament Foundations for Christian Hospitality,” *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 35, no. 1 (2014), 4. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v35i1.752>.

⁸ Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 97.

he created them" (Genesis 1:27).⁹ Because humans were created in God's image, each one, therefore, bears God's image, granting them with intrinsic worth and value.¹⁰ To reflect the *imago Dei* is "to be given regal status,"¹¹ because we are each a reflection of, and reflecting back to, God,¹² the king who sits on his throne. Our image is of God, our worth is from God, and our reflection points back to God.

Though first understood by the people of Israel as something that set them apart,¹³ a conviction that everyone bears the image of God shifts an originally exclusive belief to one that points toward inclusivity.¹⁴ According to author and theologian Leonard Sweet, "the orthodox understanding of *imago Dei* is less that each individual is created 'in the image of God' and more that all of humanity was made in God's image."¹⁵ Because of this, the more different types of people we incorporate into our lives and our churches, "the greater the glimpse of God."¹⁶ So not only are we better known in community, but through community we better know God.¹⁷ We are not only "infinitely precious"¹⁸

⁹ Net Bible: New English Translation, Net Bible: New English Translation (Spokane, WA: Biblical Studies Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Marc Turnage, *Windows into the Bible: Cultural and Historical Insights from the Bible for Modern Readers* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 2016), 381.

¹¹ T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009), 77.

¹² Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal Prophet: Jonah and the Mystery of God's Mercy* (New York, NY: Viking, 2018), 49.

¹³ Ehud Ben Zvi and Diana V. Edelman, eds., *Imagining the Other and Constructing Israelite Identity in the Early Second Temple Period* (London, UK: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014).

¹⁴ Ananda Geyser-Fouche and Carli Fourie, "Inclusivity in the Old Testament," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 73, no. 4 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i4.4761>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 222.

¹⁶ Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 222.

¹⁷ Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2016), 142.

¹⁸ Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal Prophet: Jonah and the Mystery of God's Mercy* (New York, NY: Viking, 2018), 37.

and belong to God because his image is in all of us,¹⁹ but, by being created in the image we also belong to one another.²⁰ God's reflection in each of us, therefore, not only points back to God, but also points us toward each other.

THE PRACTICE OF HOSPITALITY: LEVITICUS 19:33-34, LUKE 14, ROMANS 12:13-20

A belief that all people are God's image bearers informs the way we practice hospitality, the act of turning a stranger into a guest.²¹ But who is the stranger? As co-humans, one trait we share is that we are all strangers in this land, being shown hospitality—being welcomed as guests—by God.²² Since God is showing each of us hospitality, we, too, should in turn show hospitality to each other, our fellow travelers.²³ *Imago Dei* centered hospitality is central to the gospel and practices of the early church,²⁴ and is markedly different than Old Testament expressions of hospitality.

Though Israel's stance toward hospitality was relatively progressive for the time, the actual practice of hospitality in the Old Testament does not provide a directly applicable model for churches today,²⁵ ironically due to practices and assumptions that mimic our current assimilation structures. When looking to apply practices of hospitality from the Old Testament, it becomes clear that in order to provide protection for citizens and to uphold purity laws, for many it was actually marked by exclusivity—welcoming those who look and act like the host and fear of those who are different—and risk aversion, and was highly structured with societal rules everyone was expected to inherently

¹⁹ T. Desmond Alexander et al., eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 576.

²⁰ Keller, *The Prodigal Prophet: Jonah and the Mystery of God's Mercy*, 49.

²¹ Martin, 4.

²² *Ibid.*, 7.

²³ Leviticus 19:33-34 speaks to not oppressing "the foreigner who resides with you," asking the people of Israel to remember when they were foreigners in Egypt. Beyond having experience themselves as literal foreigners, it evolved into a belief that all people, being created in God's image, are travelers on earth, waiting to return to the true home of the God we're reflecting. In the Old Testament this wasn't understood as a commandment to show hospitality universally, but through the lens of Jesus, today we can understand that this universal receipt of earthly hospitality connects us and provides an inherent need to express hospitality to others.

²⁴ Alexander et al., eds., 561.

²⁵ Martin, 5.

know and follow.²⁶ For those who fit within the narrow parameters for whom hospitality was freely offered, it was a progressive, generous system. For those outside the pre-approved boundaries, hospitality, and the hope of further inclusion, wasn't even an option.

Following the model set by Jesus and the early church, New Testament expressions of hospitality were marked by expansive and inclusive practices. Now, instead of reserving care for those who look and act like them, Jesus taught that hospitality is to be shown to enemies,²⁷ those who cannot repay the kindness,²⁸ and is an act to be initiated by the host, not simply responsive to presented needs.²⁹ Jesus paints this new vision to a group of Pharisees who were more comfortable with Old Testament expressions,³⁰ and calls all who follow him to act in kind. Paul encourages the early church to "pursue hospitality,"³¹ shifting the posture from what was once strictly a responsive gesture to an active positioning. As the practice of hospitality expanded and became more active, determining how to engage the new guests became necessary.

INCLUSION VS. ASSIMILATION IN THE EARLY CHURCH: MATTHEW 28:19-20, 1 CORINTHIANS 12, 2 TIMOTHY 2:2

Inclusion as a practice separate from hospitality is seen most clearly in instructions to the early church. No longer is one considered a guest, but now they're brought into being a part of the group. Inclusion, the engagement step following the initial welcoming or expression of hospitality, is markedly different than the assimilation practices that guide the inclusion step in churches today.

The early church followed basic guidelines: teach what you know to an ever-growing group³² which expands your communion with God,³³ and expression of individual gifts is honoring to God and

²⁶ Ibid., 6.

²⁷ Romans 12:20

²⁸ Luke 14:12-14

²⁹ Joseph Benson, "Luke 14 Commentary," Benson Commentary on the Old and New Testaments, accessed February 17, 2021, <https://www.biblehub.com/commentaries/benson/>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Romans 12:13

³² Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (London, UK: SPCK, 2008), 42.

³³ Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 137.

necessary for the function of the church.³⁴ As the faithful were brought in, not only were they expected to teach others what they had been taught,³⁵ they were integrated into the life of the church in a way that honored their gifts, because ultimately, celebrating their abilities was a recognition of the *imago Dei* in each one. Assimilation, defined as, “the process of receiving new facts or of responding to new situations in conformity with what is already available to consciousness,” wasn’t the goal.³⁶ Inclusion didn’t seek to conform, but to integrate.

THE ROLE OF RELATIONSHIPS IN JESUS’ LIFE AND MINISTRY: MARK 12, JOHN 13:34-35, AND JOHN 15:15

Integration was necessary, because Jesus’ disciples represented a wide variety of backgrounds and personality types.³⁷ They were not part of the same group before each choosing to follow Jesus. When he invited them to join him, however, he didn’t say to each one, “become just like me,” he said, “follow me.”³⁸ Jesus’ approach to relationships provides the clearest example of how the church is to practice hospitality and inclusion.³⁹ We’re all called to follow the same person, not to look exactly alike. Appealing directly to the *imago Dei* in everyone,⁴⁰ with a culture-shifting charge to lead interactions with love,⁴¹ Jesus called us friends.⁴² Turning Old Testament categories of foreigner, stranger, and enemy on their heads, Jesus shifted the conversation, centering the idea

³⁴ Eugene E. Carpenter and Wayne McCown. “Spiritual Gifts (12:1-31).” Essay. In Asbury Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1992. Accessed January 17, 2021. <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/asbury-bible-commentary/a-spiritual-gifts-12-1-31>.

³⁵ David Buehring, *Discipleship Journey: A Guide for Making Disciples That Make Disciple-Makers* (Oviedo, FL: Higherlife Development Services, 2011), 24.

³⁶ “Assimilation,” Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster), accessed February 18, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/assimilation>.

³⁷ Leonard Sweet, *The Bad Habits of Jesus: Showing Us the Way to Live Right in a World Gone Wrong* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016), 103.

³⁸ Jesus said, “follow me” throughout the gospels, with Matthew 4:18-20 being one example.

³⁹ Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel* (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2015).

⁴⁰ Turnage, 325.

⁴¹ John 13:34-35

⁴² John 15:15

that expansive inclusion in who we love and invite in is not only important, but the hallmark of Christianity—it's how they will know who we are.⁴³

DISCUSSION

Hospitality turns strangers into guests.⁴⁴ What the Church struggles with is the following step of turning guests into part of the church itself. Assimilation often fills this void in churches today, but assimilation practices miss the mark in recognizing individual people with individual needs the church can meet and honoring abilities with which they can serve the church. G.K. Chesterton said, "It isn't that they can't see the solution. It is that they can't see the problem."⁴⁵ The Church fails to see that assimilation is a problem and moves away from Jesus' model and the model of the early church.

As we can see from the exploration of biblical texts, the transition from being welcomed to being made a part is informed by each of us bearing the image of God, both individually and communally. As we move into being part of the Church, we're not meant to lose our individually given gifts or specific expressions of God in our lives; rather we're to learn how to use those as an integrated part of the Church. Our individual gifts benefit the larger community. Instead of embracing this practice used by Jesus and the early church, many churches have reverted to the exclusionary hospitality practices of the Old Testament.

Inclusion, as opposed to assimilation as marked by conforming, allows the *imago Dei* of each guest-turned-part-of-the-church to be celebrated and honored. Further, this integration of whole selves into the church improves the functioning of the body. The church doesn't need only big toes, it needs members performing the variety of roles they've been gifted to serve and through which they can express their true, God-shaped selves.⁴⁶ Assimilation with an eye toward conformity stifles both individual growth potential and the growth potential of the Church.

Section 2: Topic History and Key Voices

Topic History

How does assimilation, a theme that doesn't show up in the early expression of the church, become a central driver of "success" in the American church today? A convergence of American exceptionalism and the church heartily embracing business practices as their own best practices

⁴³ John 13:35

⁴⁴ Martin, 4.

⁴⁵ G. K. Chesterton, *The Scandal of Father Brown* (Leeds, UK: House of Stratus, Inc., 2008), 141.

⁴⁶ Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church*, 214.

connect the thread of hospitality as seen in the New Testament to hospitality now being a structured part of a church's assimilation process.

The first thing to note is that the church defines assimilation differently than the dictionary. The standard definition of assimilation, stated previously as "the process of receiving new facts or of responding to new situations in conformity with what is already available to consciousness,"⁴⁷ differs from the church definition of, "a process whereby we transform our programs, services, and events into connection points to foster human interactions that become the genesis of authentic community,"⁴⁸ yet both rely on process, and both imply transformation. This is important, because while the argument could be made that this is a terminology issue more than a systemic people issue, the varying definitions actually point to a root cause for why this thinking can be problematic. The original pushes conformity while the church definition promises connection, engagement, and community. The reality, however, is that the church application is more complicated. History suggests we've adjusted how we talk about assimilation in churches, but the embedded mindset remains. When this assimilation-as-conformity mindset is partnered with a full-throttle embrace of business processes applied to the church, we begin to see how the sincere desire to help people become engaged in church community misses the mark for building genuine connection.

HISTORY OF ASSIMILATION IN THE AMERICAN CHURCH

Understanding historical expressions of assimilation provides context for where we are today. Worship services in the early church weren't designed to attract newcomers, in part because persecution led them to hold services in secret, but also because they believed that apostles had already fulfilled the Great Commission.⁴⁹ Though there was an expectation of aligned habitus once people became Christians, the process was uncoordinated and slow and driven by relationship.⁵⁰ Four centuries later, Augustine rejected this expectation of changed behaviors, suggesting that internal changes and feelings are enough to become a Christian; modifying actions is unnecessary, writing that, "a certain kind of harshness," can be excused if your inner state is loving.⁵¹ Augustine also brought about a new understanding of the need for missions, replacing a patient, relational

⁴⁷ "Assimilation," Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster), accessed February 18, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/assimilation>.

⁴⁸ Dave Bair and Steve Caton, *The Assimilation Engine: Four Processes That Drive How People Connect with Your Church* (Church Community Builder, Inc, 2013), https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/857538/CCB/_docs/eBooks/the-assimilation-engine.pdf, 3.

⁴⁹ Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 10-11.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 12-14.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 291.

approach with one that was marked by, “impatient, forceful actions—animated of course by loving intentions.”⁵² The model provided by this forceful approach—status and good intentions excuse behavior—dramatically shaped the mission efforts in the early days of the United States.

The implications of divorcing intentions and actions for Christ was seen when European explorers and settlers in North America quickly moved from romanticizing Native Americans to seeking to forcibly assimilate them to European culture through education and Christianization.⁵³ Assimilation through Christianization efforts targeting slave population saw evangelists only sharing parts of the gospel that continued to secure the power of those in authority,⁵⁴ highlighting another common and disturbing practice. Manifest Destiny, the term coined to describe the God-ordained western expansion following the end of the Civil War,⁵⁵ set the stage for a mindset that American Christians were not just destined to occupy the lands and Christianize the people between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, but had a special obligation to bring God’s word to the whole world.⁵⁶ The thrust to make people resemble American Christians in the process⁵⁷ suggests God wasn’t seen as a global, and can only be found in westernized expressions.⁵⁸

As immigration increased into the United States’ “melting pot,” churches assumed a principal role in assimilating newcomers through aggressive evangelism.⁵⁹ Though “melting pot” language started being replaced with a preference for “salad bowl” language in the rest of society, representing a cultural shift away from accepting assimilation as necessary or good in the 1960s,⁶⁰

⁵² Ibid., 294.

⁵³ Edwin S. Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2009), 9.

⁵⁴ Nancy Koester, *Introduction to the History of Christianity in the United States* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 49.

⁵⁵ Koester, 280-281.

⁵⁶ Gaustad and Schmidt, 255.

⁵⁷ Dave Schmelzer, *Blue Ocean Faith: The Vibrant Connection to Jesus That Opens Up Insanely Great Possibilities in a Secularizing World—and Might Kick Off a New Jesus Movement* (Canton, MI: Front Edge Publishing, 2017), 95.

⁵⁸ Schmelzer, 88.

⁵⁹ Gaustad and Schmidt, 272-273.

⁶⁰ Bruce Thornton, “Melting Pots and Salad Bowls,” *Hooover Digest* 4 (October 26, 2012), <https://www.hoover.org/research/melting-pots-and-salad-bowls>.

parts of the American church were embracing different ideas. The Church Growth Movement, which taught that the only growing churches are homogenous churches,⁶¹ reinforced existing ideas of destiny, evangelism, and assimilation, encouraging the American church to continue embracing conformity. A Manifest destiny-based understanding of assimilation—that we’ve been God-ordained to make outsiders conform to us—expanded to include a belief that not only are we entitled, but we’re doing eternal favors by requiring this conformity, setting the stage for how assimilation is approached in churches today.

BUSINESS OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT AS CHURCH MANAGEMENT

Another impressive cultural force that has shifted a major area of thinking in the church is church-as-business.⁶² Specifically, the church adopting business operations management strategies to create systems and processes to more efficiently operate⁶³ has led business management and strategy experts to become some of the loudest voices guiding the systematic direction of the church. One church-management-as-business advocate writes, “Effective church management is the appropriate administration of church resources (people, time, and money).”⁶⁴ When resources include things like facilities and finances, the application is clear. When people are viewed as “church resources” instead of those who embody the image of God, however, the application begins to raise concerns.

In business operations management language, “your most important resource is your people.”⁶⁵ People as resources in this instance applies to staff or those who are helping complete the mission, whereas the customer is a separate entity. When this thinking is applied to people in the church, the distinction of resources vs. customer is missed, so the application is inherently flawed. Some

⁶¹ Jesse Curtis, “White Evangelicals as a ‘People’: The Church Growth Movement from India to the United States,” *Religion and American Culture* 30, no. 1 (2020): pp. 108-146, <https://doi.org/10.1017/rac.2020.2>, 110.

⁶² Thom S. Rainer, “Five Healthy Ways to Run Your Church Like a Business,” *Church Answers* Featuring Thom Rainer, August 19, 2019, <https://churchanswers.com/blog/five-healthy-ways-to-run-your-church-like-a-business/>.

⁶³ John W. Wimberly, *The Business of the Church : The Uncomfortable Truth That Faithful Ministry Requires Effective Management* (Herndon, VA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 16-17.

⁶⁴ Patricia S. Lotich, *Smart Church Management: A Quality Approach to Church Administration* (San Bernardino, CA: Bowkers, 2020).

⁶⁵ Praveen Pillai, “Employees as Brand Ambassadors,” *Arab Health*, October 2014, pp. 2-4, <https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.1318.6567>.

have cautioned against business practices turning church programs into little more than church marketing and consumer orientation tools,⁶⁶ and yet that's precisely how they are often used.

When the church adopted business operations practices, it also inherited a penchant for metric-based success measures. Peter Drucker, a renowned business management thinker, is attributed as asserting, "If you can't measure it, you can't improve it."⁶⁷ Church engagement metrics often include attendance and giving. These are the right metrics for facilities and finance issues, but when used to measure engagement success of people-centered programming, it raises questions about how these outputs align with the stated goals. Still, many tout the predictive power between quantifiable metrics and engagement. While quantifiable metrics are easier to gather and analyze than qualifiable measures, the messier, experiential metrics provide more helpful insight into people-centered programming. Seemingly using the Drucker principle, however, since they cannot be easily measured, they are largely ignored.

The deeply ingrained assimilation mindset merged with the church adopting business practices has distorted the overall framework with which we approach the "business" of the church. In practice, applying business processes altered the focus and metrics of success, turning engagement with prospective members into a numbers game instead of a relationship-driven progression. In this process, hospitality stops being a posture of welcoming and inclusion, and instead becomes one part of an assimilation process—an assembly line approach to fitting visitors into the church.

WHAT EXACTLY IS THE ASSIMILATION PROCESS?

Adopting a business operations approach, churches have created systematic engagement pipelines, often referred to as the assimilation process. Assimilation processes differ, but there are some typical elements, often covered over several meetings:

INFORMATION ABOUT THE CHURCH

- Theological information: History, beliefs, and membership requirements
- Programing information: Local and global mission engagement and discipleship methods

INFORMATION ABOUT HOW TO ENGAGE IN THE CHURCH

- Ways to serve: Serving teams, volunteer requirements (both what is required to volunteer and how many volunteers are currently needed), and the importance of tithes and offerings.

⁶⁶ Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2007), 167-168.

⁶⁷ Dave Lavinsky, "The Two Most Important Quotes in Business," *Growthink*, September 30, 2020, <https://www.growthink.com/content/two-most-important-quotes-business>.

This is sometimes partnered with a personality test or personal gift inventory with the promise that better understanding yourself will create a good fit between you and the areas that need volunteers within the church.

- Ways to engage in community: Connect with small groups, Sunday school, missions, events, and age-specific ministries

This information is helpful and necessary when looking to become part of a church. It becomes problematic, however, when the claimed goals of these assimilation processes don't align with the actual outcomes. Many elements covered within the assimilation process resemble a traditional "newcomer" or membership class model. By contrast, however, a membership class claims to provide more information about the church and explain how one can become a part of the congregation. The purpose is clear, and the anticipated outcome is easily measured: do participants know more about the church? Do participants understand how to become a member? Most assimilation processes, meanwhile, claim to provide enhanced self-knowledge, personal growth, community, and integration into the church. The language—both direct and indirect—suggests that once the process is completed, participants will belong.

Key Voices

The convergence of business management proponents, Church Growth Movement advocates, and marketing efforts of church management system salespeople and consultants, mixed with misapplication of cherry-picked portions of the assimilation systems advanced by well-known pastors, has created a tangled landscape of influential voices shaping the assimilation process used in many churches today. Pushing back against the systems-based approach, there is also a reemerging call for people-centered hospitality, rejecting the formulaic answers in favor of messy engagement.

BUSINESS OPERATIONS IMPACT ON ASSIMILATION PROCESS

A common operations management refrain from the *garbage in-garbage out principle* is that systems and outputs are only as good as the data you put in,⁶⁸ which further illustrates the problematic nature of directly applying these principles to the assimilation process. What data is being put in to measure the success of the system? Are people data points or image bearers? Is it reasonable to expect them to be both? Referring back to Drucker's wisdom that only what is measured can be improved, these metrics aren't measuring what they're claiming to, and the systematic process doesn't produce the outcome being claimed. Yet we continue to use these as measures of engagement success, tinkering with the system and process when the outcomes aren't right, or assigning blame to the participants when we hear stories of people disappointed about

⁶⁸ Jill Butler, William Lidwell, and Kritina Holder, *Universal Principles of Design*, Revised and Updated: 125 Ways to Enhance Usability, Influence Perception, Increase Appeal, Make Better Design Decisions, and Teach through Design (Rockport Publishers, 2012), 112.

the lack of actual connection, community, and growth. With this method, conformity becomes an unofficial metric.

Operations management approaches also assume a bell curve, and are created to address the majority, considering anything outside of the middle part of the curve a defect that needs to be worked out through refining the process.⁶⁹ Church assimilation processes do the same, but unlike the manufacturing defects or inefficiencies being removed, when churches apply this methodology, the “defects” outside the middle of the bell curve are people. Those who are “successful” are the ones who fit in to the church as it is. This “success,” however, loses the benefit of an expanded view of God being revealed to us as we invite more people in at the expense of conformity-driven assimilation.⁷⁰

Lean Six Sigma is a leading business process driven by efficiency and reducing variations. Six Sigma Control Charts are a primary tool used to illustrate a process of understanding acceptable deviations from the norm, which can be narrowed by man-made specifications often intended to restrict the allowable outcomes to the process.⁷¹ Anything that falls outside of the newly acceptable limits is seen as a defect and assumed to be a design flaw impeding efficiency and not meeting pre-approved quality control measures. The church applies a Control Chart mentality when it makes process adjustments to control outcomes, and sees actions falling outside of the acceptable limits as flawed. In Six Sigma language, a defect on the Control Chart is referred to as “out of control;” this language has been coopted by churches, too. When this thinking is applied to a church’s assimilation process, those who doesn’t neatly fit into a pre-determined role are considered “out of control.” Typically, any further actions are limited, meaning the visitor will never integrate into the life of the church.

There is hope, however, if the church continues to eagerly apply business practices, as business innovators themselves are recognizing the need to return to a people-first focus. Drip, an email marketing platform, announced several years ago their switch from using the term “subscribers” to “people,” stating, “companies should be placing more value on who their customers actually are, not just in their accumulation. We believe that behind every email address...there is a living, breathing human craving real relationships.”⁷² There is also a push to stop referring to employees

⁶⁹ Jay Heizer, Barry Render, and Chuck Munson, *Operations Management Sustainability and Supply Chain Management*, 12th ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2020), 246-257.

⁷⁰ Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church*, 222.

⁷¹ “What Is Six Sigma?,” ASQ, accessed March 25, 2021, <https://asq.org/quality-resources/six-sigma>.

⁷² (Drip, January 6, 2019), <https://www.drip.com/blog/news/ecommerce-customers-are-people-not-subscribers>.

as assets or resources.⁷³ If we are to follow their lead, the church is in position to determine if we're more invested in the systems and supporting technology, or in the people we serve. Realigning toward people-first would require recognizing and celebrating the unique make up of each person looking to engage with the church.

KEY VOICES IMPACTING DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHURCH ASSIMILATION PROCESSES

The theoretical and practitioner voices behind application of the assimilation process are each underscored by the pervasiveness of business advocates profiting from the implementation of these systems, creating a chicken-or-the-egg scenario raising questions about who most benefits.

Church Growth Movement. Applying foreign missionary experience to churches domestically, Donald A. McGavran launched the Church Growth Movement (CGM) in the 1970s, providing strategy to help evangelical churches.⁷⁴ Driven by the Homogenous Unit Principle,⁷⁵ which proposed the most successful churches were ones where "church membership is composed of basically one kind of people,"⁷⁶ CGM used field data, statistics, and graphs depicting human behavior as core elements supporting systemic church growth.⁷⁷ McGavran was criticized for being overly pragmatic, seeking "to make business of Church-growth a real business-enterprise," and being too "caught up in the modern trend of American business-thinking," wanting "growth for growth's sake,"⁷⁸ yet the lasting impact of his shift toward business principles to support assimilation-process-based church growth is undeniable.

Online Church Management System and Consultant Influence. Library resource and internet searches for books and articles about the assimilation process primarily returns blog posts on how to implement an assimilation process and use business principles for church growth and blogs by church growth consultants. Online Church Management System (ChMS) marketers also

⁷³ Leo Bottary, "CEOs in 2020 - 'Employees Are People, Not Assets,'" *CEOWorld Magazine*, August 13, 2020, <https://ceoworld.biz/2020/08/13/ceos-in-2020-employees-are-people-not-assets/>.

⁷⁴ Curtis, 108.

⁷⁵ Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 163.

⁷⁶ Curtis, 128.

⁷⁷ George G. Hunter, "The Legacy of Donald A. McGavran," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 16, no. 4 (1992): 160, <https://doi.org/10.1177/239693939201600404>.

⁷⁸ Curtis, 114.

authored many of the eBooks⁷⁹ and blogs⁸⁰ supporting an assimilation process. Both indicate that the loudest voices currently advocating business-application-assimilation-process-growth are those who profit from the implementation.

Church growth consultants also provide many articles and blogs supporting and explaining the assimilation process⁸¹ and business practices for church.⁸² Some provide training based off original instruction, with intention to point out the importance of being mindful of individual context when seeking to apply the teachings.⁸³ Many others base their services off systems derived from well-known pastors.⁸⁴ These often resemble a copy-and-paste approach to applying the process to all contexts. Like the pieces put out by ChMS, these often act more as marketing products for the consultant's services, which does not negate the potential helpfulness of the information they provide but does raise a question as to who benefits most from the application of the processes.

Misapplication of Others' Ministry Experience. Church growth consultants also write book reviews (or book-derived opinion pieces) covering works by well-known pastors. Typically, these provide distilled, a-few-easy-steps-to-follow formats or copy-and-paste guides⁸⁵ for how to emulate the pastor's success. Sharing only the plug-and-play processes is understandable since it is not as easy to duplicate relationships, personality, meaningful sermons, or mindsets also shared in the original books. Divorced from the thoughtfulness and context that birthed the original

⁷⁹ Bair and Caton.

⁸⁰ Scott Magdalein, "The Keys to Creating A Scalable Church Assimilation or Growth Track Process," ServeHQ, September 24, 2019, <https://servehq.church/blog/scalable-church-assimilation-process-growth-track/>.

⁸¹ Anthony Svajda, "Caffeinated Theology," *Caffeinated Theology* (blog), March 27, 2019, <https://caffeinatedtheology.com/assimilation-process/>.

⁸² Patricia Lotich, "9 Keys to Effective Church Management," Smart Church Management, December 29, 2020, <https://smartchurchmanagement.com/effective-church-management/>.

⁸³ "Homepage," The Malphurs Group, December 18, 2020, <https://malphursgroup.com/>.

⁸⁴ EvangelismCoach, "EvangelismCoach," *EvangelismCoach* (blog), March 18, 2017, <https://www.evangelismcoach.org/favorite-books-church-visitor-assimilation/>.

⁸⁵ Tony Cooke, *Assimilation System Guide* (Broken Arrow, OK: Tony Cooke Ministries, 2014), <https://www.tonycooke.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Assimilation-System-Guide.pdf>

processes, however, they become data-driven without concern for relationships, and instead of being part of a larger method, they become the method.

The prevalence of these reviews also gives the impression that the books they're reviewing were more heavily skewed toward supporting assimilation processes than they actually are. In fact, the reviews sometimes completely misrepresent the original intent of the book entirely. Andy Stanley's *Deep & Wide* is often included on assimilation process book lists and reviews, yet in it, Stanley writes, "I grew up around people who believed the church was for saved people who acted like saved people. I'm all too familiar with that church brand. The catch was that they were the ones who decided what act like a saved person meant,"⁸⁶ which pushes against an assimilation-focused approach. Stanley's church, North Point Community Church, did create *Starting Point*, a course targeted to those who are unchurched, but it is not church-specific.⁸⁷ Despite this, it's often also included on assimilation process resource lists.

Similarly, *Purpose Driven Church* by Rick Warren is often cited, and misrepresented.⁸⁸ *Class 101-401* is frequently included in assimilation process lists, yet the classes are one part of a multi-step process built to support Warren's belief that a church is built on five purposes: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and evangelism.⁸⁹ By separating the class element and presenting it as a standalone system, the holistic approach is distorted.

There are churches truly promoting assimilation processes that are widely imitated, including Church of the Highlands' *Growth Track*, a three-step process to "discover your redemptive purpose and live the life God created for you,"⁹⁰ and Long Hollow Baptist Church's *The Discipleship Pathway*.⁹¹ True assimilation processes that are attributable to their originator, however, are the exception.

⁸⁶ Andy Stanley, *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), Loc 767.

⁸⁷ "Starting Point," North Point Community Church, accessed March 29, 2021, <https://northpoint.org/diy-starting-point>.

⁸⁸ Cooke

⁸⁹ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Every Church Is Big in Gods Eyes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).

⁹⁰ "Growth Track: Church of the Highlands," Church of the Highlands, accessed March 29, 2021, <https://www.churchofthehighlands.com/growth-track>.

⁹¹ "The Discipleship Pathway: Long Hollow," Long Hollow Baptist Church, accessed March 29, 2021, <https://longhollow.com/the-discipleship-pathway/>.

WHAT ABOUT HOSPITALITY?

Hospitality has remained a central tradition of the church, though in practice in many churches it has become synonymous with the performative tasks of hospitality (welcome team, ushers, greeters, parking lot attendees) rather than the visitor-centered historical approach. As the practice of hospitality became more task-driven than relationship-generating, it's often included within the assimilation process. Although engagement is the initial intention for both relationship-driven, or organic, hospitality and assimilation-process-as-hospitality, the reliance on process, leading to a focus on quantitative over qualitative measures of success ultimately skews both the system and the outcome itself. A formulaic, one-size-fits-all approach to welcoming people into a church body by design leaves out those who don't fit within that one size.

Reacting to the realization that process-driven-engagement makes intuitively responding to people's needs secondary (if it happens at all), there are some who are pushing against performative-hospitality and hospitality that can be quantitatively measured. Narrative or story-driven approaches⁹² and a focus on organically growing relationships⁹³ as a precursor to engagement and discipleship have seen a resurgence. One specific movement within this expression of hospitality is the Dinner Church movement originated by Verlon Fosner.

Modeled after what Fosner calls Jesus' *Dinner Table Theology*, Dinner Church seeks to remember "themes of rescue, inclusion of strangers, inclusion of the poor, remembrance of the lamb, and the expectation of miraculous intervention."⁹⁴ Important to note is that Dinner Church, though pushing against a systemic approach, isn't without structure. The structure, however, is built with flexibility and individual expression in mind, seeking to center the needs and feedback of guests more than maintaining control.⁹⁵ In general, a marker of the church movements pushing against these quantitative-driven approaches is comfort with human messiness and a recognition that there is not just one correct way to "do" church.⁹⁶ Relationship centered hospitality sets the stage for discipleship, engagement, and feelings of belonging. It shifts the focus away from serving only the middle of the bell curve, seeking to accommodate those on the margins, too.

⁹² Ryan Von Weaver, *There Was This Guy Named Jesus... A Narrative Approach to Discipleship* (Ellicott City, MD: Milltown Publishing, 2015), 5.

⁹³ Dennis McCallum and Jessica Lowery, *Organic Discipleship: Mentoring Others into Spiritual Maturity and Leadership* (Columbus, OH: New Paradigm, 2012), 5.

⁹⁴ Verlon Fosner, *Welcome to Dinner, Church* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2017), 17.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 79-91.

⁹⁶ Daniel Im, *No Silver Bullets: 5 Small Shifts That Will Transform Your Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2017), 25.

Further, instead of pushing conformity, these efforts align with the view of unity A. W. Tozer proposes. He writes, “Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers met together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become 'unity' conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.”⁹⁷ In the assimilation process, our tuning fork becomes fellow worshipers, meaning we’re more aligned to each other than to Christ.

An antonym of assimilation is diversity, which Paul taught was fundamental to the healthy functioning of the church. Assimilation processes weed out diversity, leading to questionable church health. Hospitality honors diversity, welcoming all in. Taking a page from those leading in organic-but-structured ways, and those uplifting narrative-driven relationships, it is time for our churches to move beyond systematized assimilation processes into a Jesus-as-unifier approach.

Section 3: Conclusion and Synthesis

Synthesis

Hospitality was a core value for the people of Israel, was central to Jesus’ earthly ministry, and continues to be a driving force in churches today. The need for hospitality—the continuation of our gospel legacy—is almost universally acknowledged. Of course hospitality is central to the Christian expression! Of course hospitality is important! We are commanded to be hospitable.⁹⁸

There is general agreement that it is important for those looking to become part of a specific church community to know about the community they’re entering into and to understand what being a part of it entails. Knowing how to engage with the programs or ministries that exist is also critical. The exchange of hospitality and engagement for assimilation—genuine relationship for process—however, is problematic. It is this systematic application of “hospitality-by-way-of-assimilation” that alters the outcome. While there can be presumed alignment in original objectives behind both hospitality and assimilation, the slight deviations in trajectory of practice lead to vastly different experiences. Because of this, we must look beyond the starting point, and instead explore where this divergence in posture leads.

The deviation in trajectory from hospitality and engagement to assimilation is seen in the application, where participant expectations and church-stated-outcomes rarely match reality. This often leads to participant disappointment or disengagement and church leadership left confused

⁹⁷ A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God: The Human Thirst for the Divine* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015).

⁹⁸ Romans 12:13

as to why those who have gone through the process still struggle to fully engage. The first message participants receive is that engagement in the church is a pre-determined assembly line, where proactive participation is not required, and belonging is assured. Once the assimilation process is complete, however, the often-unspoken expectation from church leadership is for people to become proactive in their engagement, which is where the promised sense of belonging typically occurs. But these updated rules-of-engagement aren't communicated and there isn't clarity on the new expectations for how and where to engage long-term.

Beyond engagement, the precedent set through the assimilation process also creates unrealistic expectations for spiritual development, suggesting that everyone's step-by-step experience is the same. Church leaders complain about lack of engagement, but the consumeristic system created to introduce people to the culture of the church rarely matches the expectations of personal ownership after the assimilation process is complete. If the goal of assimilation is setting up engagement in the church and in community (often the assumed vehicle of spiritual development), everyone is being set up for disappointment.

When hospitality moves from being the driver of relational engagement to one part of an assimilation checklist, it no longer aligns with the historical expression of the Church, creating an unnecessary gap for which we have a longstanding blueprint of how to fill. Instead of acknowledging the gap, however, we're continuing to turn to business practices in lieu of biblical values, working to perfect the process instead of realizing the process *is* the problem. There are cases to be made for business processes in churches, but people-based ministries are not where they should be applied. Once people are viewed as a resource it's difficult to transition back to viewing them as who the church is called to serve. This causes further confusion in the way people are regarded by church leadership as they simultaneously support and oppose a consumeristic culture. The church would benefit from shifting away from people-as-resource language and adopting people-first language. This is not simply an issue of updating terminology, however, but instead requires an update in focus away from quantifiable to qualifiable measures and values.

In *The Deeply Formed Life*, Rich Villodas writes, "This is the good news of the gospel. Even when you make mistakes, don't perform, and can't get your act together, Jesus comes to you and says, 'I want you. I'm calling you, and I'm sending you.'"⁹⁹ When belonging is tied to assimilation and behavioral alignment in our churches, we fail to model the good news of the gospel.

Though outside of the scope of this paper, it is clear that theological factors beyond an openness to reexamining assimilation processes and the impact of business operation systems on the church will play a role. One holding a centered-set approach would be more likely to embrace a reimagined narrative-based system than one preferring a bounded-set approach. Similarly, the assumed relationship between orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and feelings around whether someone can belong before they believe, a generalized comfort with ambiguity compared to certainty, and

⁹⁹ Rich Villodas, *The Deeply Formed Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2020), 173.

where one falls in their belief of whether or not discipleship is linear are also factors in openness to these ideas.

Conclusion

Once something is systematized, it's difficult for it to also be genuine. When there are success metrics tied to hospitality, the question of whether it's being driven by a sincere desire to welcome people or a sincere desire to meet quotas is legitimate. The sincerity is tainted as we force-fit soft skills to support hard metrics. We're told throughout scripture that we're all unique, yet as institutions we've developed and cling to one-size-fits-all discipleship pathways and assimilation plans ignoring God-given gifts, differences, and unique narratives.

Assimilation takes the idea of *imago Dei* reflection in each of us pointing back to God and each other, and replaces it with a mirror. We've been given a picture of heaven where everyone is invited to the banquet and diversity is celebrated.¹⁰⁰ Why, then, do we make the first step of church membership—the expression of Jesus in the world today—assimilation? When did, “look like us,” become the celebrated norm? And when did we become the metric by which holiness is measured?

Rob Bell stated, “the radical is not somebody who wandered off into the deep weeds. The radical is somebody who went back to the source of the tradition.”¹⁰¹ When it comes to hospitality, it's time for us to be radical. We must go back to the source, prizing relationship over compliance. It's time for the church to practice radical hospitality.

¹⁰⁰ Luke 14:12-14

¹⁰¹ Rob Bell on Almost Heretical podcast, Episode 64, May 15, 2019.

Appendix C—Milestone 3 Design Workshop Report

NPO Statement

Provide an alternative approach to communicate belonging to newcomers, turning from metric-based prescribed assimilation to continual, mutually responsive growth and investment.

NPO Scope and Constraints

I plan to reimagine the approach churches and organizations use to communicate belonging to, and encourage engagement from, newcomers, in part incorporating a question-based framework for evaluating their current model. One challenge I'll face is that my NPO addresses unintended side effects of the current sincere methods, so part of the scope will include raising awareness of the role of assimilation models in the disconnect between expectations and results for both the church and the newcomers. The concept pitches I'm considering are primarily digitally-based so cost will be mostly limited to service subscription fees and occasional printing costs.

NPO Context

My NPO is applicable to those who would benefit from a reimagined way of welcoming newcomers. This includes most non-denominational churches, mainline denominations that practice open communion (as that tends to be indicative of their current policy and approach to welcoming newcomers), and Christian non-profits seeking to build relational connections and to disciple congregants and participants. The mutually inclusive model is appropriate across generational, cultural, and racial communities because we all want to belong and be known. The biggest indicator of contextual fit is less demographic-related than it is leadership posture focused. Church or organization leadership who are open to change and experimentation, comfortable with releasing some control, and have a willingness to embrace the temporary ambiguity of a non-prescriptive approach will benefit the most. This scalable approach fits all congregation and organization sizes but will require increasing staff or volunteer numbers and engagement scaled to fit the need.

Root Causes

Prescriptive assimilation models are adopted largely because of their easy to replicate programmatic structures. Despite the widespread adoption of these one-size-fits-all models, this very element that makes them attractive is the primary problem; People aren't "one-size." Additionally, because the current models were adopted in good faith and few practitioners have ever experienced them as a newcomer, there is some reluctance to acknowledge the model itself is the problem, instead preferring to blame the newcomers for the system failures.

Another root cause is misalignment of expected investment. Newcomers expect the church to continue its investment in them beyond the programmatic phase, while churches expect a transition where the newcomers become the primary investors both in the church and themselves. This

wholesale handoff of responsibility leads to disappointment on both sides; Leadership is disappointed by the ensuing lack of engagement and the newcomer questions whether they ever actually belonged.

Definition of 'Done'

The ultimate goal is to increase alignment between the church and newcomer definition and experiences of belonging by elevating discipleship and hospitality over assimilation.

Three Big Ideas

Since 'done' requires raising awareness of the misalignment in belonging and then addressing it, each of the big ideas focus in on a different stage in the process: developing an assessment tool, creating a strategy workshop, or writing a book on the "bridge" between newcomer program and full engagement.

Three Concept Pitches

Newcomer-Bridge Diagnostic Tool

Develop a robust diagnostic tool for churches to use to evaluate the current sense of belonging by newcomers and the bridge to engagement. Using results from a mixture of surveys, working groups made up of newcomers and long-term members, and questionnaires for staff, each church will receive a descriptive evaluation with strengths, growth areas, and neutral-but-good-to-know areas diagnosed. Each evaluation will also include corresponding suggestions and best practices to address growth areas and "mini evaluations" to help assess progress throughout implementation of selected methods. This continued evaluation is key as it provides a way to ensure that the element(s) addressed were, in fact, the area(s) in need of attention, and the methods of engagement are yielding results in the desired direction.

This approach will allow feedback from members who are going through the systems to be the driving force behind evaluations, meaning that those who are most impacted will have the loudest voice. The risk is that churches will not survey and listen to a broad group.

My assumption is that feedback from a wide variety of people who are invested in the success of a program that promotes belonging will illuminate growth areas and areas of strength the church is unaware of, and that by addressing the growth areas and harnessing the areas of strength, the church can improve their methods toward belonging, investing, and growing.

I'll have insight into whether this works if churches are willing to widely survey their members and are then willing to listen equally to feedback from newcomers as well as long-term members. If suggestions are implemented, the ongoing mini-evaluations will provide insight into their efficacy.

Reciprocal Growth and Investment Strategic Workshop

Create a workshop experience for church staff members who manage or influence hospitality practices at their church. The workshop will include teaching and activities around reimagining belonging and engagement, provide a tool for, and instruction around, evaluating their current system, and a question-based framework for developing a new welcoming model centering reciprocal growth and investment that is unique to each participants' context. The workshop will bring awareness to the role prescriptive assimilation models play in systemic church issues (dissatisfaction with involvement and commitment of members, a steady stream out the "backdoor," and a consumeristic posture in members, to name a few) and will provide a strategic framework for developing a context-specific answer to the need and desire for belonging and engagement that will be implementation-ready at the end of the workshop.

The workshop's success will rely on participants who are open to not just making their current system better but making it different. Incremental adjustments will not garner the promised results, meaning that an honest assessment of their system and willingness to try something entirely new is necessary. Further, the ultimate success of a workshop model depends on something entirely out of my hands since implementation of the changes is beyond the scope of this method. If implementation fails or isn't completed, I run the risk of the participant assumption being that the workshop's method was what failed.

My assumption is that by developing a unique model focused on reciprocal growth and investment, belonging and engagement will follow. I'll know this workshop model works if participant churches truly develop unique models from the question-based framework, as this will determine, in part, if the questions are too leading or too broad. Willingness to reimagine their current system will be a good indicator of the efficacy of the initial teaching and activities.

Known Small Group Study

Develop a small group study, working title *Known*, to be used by churches in lieu of current assimilation models. *Known* is an 8-week study centered around both church and participant history, vision, and mission. *Known* seeks to build relationships between newcomers and is led by volunteers who will continue in an advisory role for participants for at least one year assisting their ongoing engagement and spiritual growth. Building connections between newcomers creates a sense of belonging with others who are looking for the same thing, and the advisor's continuing role establishes continuity in engagement and care covering the "bridge" season most models neglect and ensuring an ongoing point of contact for participants.

Known can scale by adjusting how often it is offered or by modifying structure to accommodate the number of people going through at one time (i.e., instead of traditional small groups, offer a large-group meeting that divides into small groups after the teaching to allow for connections between all newcomers, yet concentrated time with a small group and advisor/leader). The biggest risk is finding volunteers to lead *Known* since they will need a broad understanding of, and connections within, the church, ability to engage participants, and can work semi-autonomously beyond the

initial 8 weeks. For churches that can't run *Known* continually, a stopgap will need to be established to care for newcomers arriving between group offerings.

The primary test will be if to see if participants are connecting with each other and if both parties feel known at the end of the 8 weeks, both of which can be surveyed at the end of the group. The long-term benefits of the ongoing advisor role will be more difficult to assess due to time constraints, but I can establish checkpoints at different intervals to measure efficacy to that point.

Design Workshop Stakeholders

Workshop stakeholders included three Connections Pastors representing urban and suburban multisite churches, a consultant, strategist, and meeting facilitator, and two church volunteers seeking greater belonging.

One-On-One Interviews

I interviewed Community Pastors at an urban multisite church and an urban megachurch, a church consultant and strategist, and a suburban multisite church Discipleship Pastor.

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Bowler, Kate (@katecbowler). 2021. "a blessing for getting unstuck." Instagram, August 8, 2021. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CSUHaBKNa-L/>.

Dirty Rotten Church Kids (@dirtyrottenchurchkids). 2021. "Not giving someone room to disagree with you has to be the most Christian thing I've ever seen." Instagram, October 10, 2021. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CU2wYIOgMOI/>.

The Instagram feeds of Kate Bowler and Dirty Rotten Church Kids provide contrasting responses to disillusionment born in part from the negative impact of assimilation-focused, metric-based church systems. Though an unorthodox research choice, my NPO centers on a church-systems-based critique that is not widely seen or understood. Each of these feeds, however, provides other church-systems-based critiques from current and former church insiders, respectively, providing a unique perspective largely unavailable from traditional sources. Further, the comment sections provide access to unprecedented candor from the very audience my NPO seeks to serve—those who desperately want to belong in a church but struggle despite doing everything the system asked of them— and showcases the very feedback I've found most churches dismiss. Kate Bowler's feed focuses on developing a new way to engage once your eyes have been opened to the unhelpful practices while Dirty Rotten Church Kids' curated feed is admittedly more critical, but both provide a platform for honest discussion about feeling disconnected from the church which provides important feedback for a project seeking to reimagine how belonging is communicated in a way that it's understood.

Kochanska, Grazyna. "Mutually Responsive Orientation between Mothers and Their Young Children: Implications for Early Socialization." *Child Development* 68, no. 1 (1997): 94-112. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1131928>.

This article, which appeared in *Child Development*, the flagship journal of the Society for Research in Child Development, summarizes a study on the socialization benefits of reciprocal parenting orientations looking specifically at mothers' use of power in disciplinary interactions and the child's internalization of maternal rules and values. In part, the study found that in relationships high in mutually responsive orientation, mothers showed "high empathic perspective taking" and used less power in discipline and the child showed increased internalization of the mothers' values and rules; Exerting power isn't necessary to impart expectations. Further, empathy and mutual investment lead to more promising results. This supports my findings on newcomers within the church, if the church is assumed to be in the role of parent and newcomer in the role of child, and provides a helpful corollary for the symbiotic growth and investment I'm envisioning for the church and newcomers.

Miller, Donald. *Building a StoryBrand: Clarify Your Message so Customers Will Listen*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2017.

Written for businesses to improve their marketing efforts through a focus on story, author and CEO of StoryBrand, Donald Miller, guides business leaders through understanding, harnessing, and communicating their unique story. Through a 7-step process that moves away from traditional marketing and costumer engagement approaches, Miller aims to help businesses reimagine the way they talk about who they are, what they do, and the unique value they bring to the marketplace. Applying a similar principle to the church, this three-part personal narrative could be rephrased as sharing your history, your vision, and your mission, which is a central component to the *Known* concept I've proposed. More generally, each of my concept pitches require the end-user church to be able to articulate their context and what makes them unique. Adopting the StoryBrand system or a similar concept could help provide a framework to that process.

Von Der Ruhr, Marc, and Joseph P. Daniels. "Subsidizing Religious Participation Through Groups: A Model of the 'Megachurch' Strategy for Growth." *Review of Religious Research* 53, no. 4 (2011): 471-91. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-011-0024-3>.

Presenting data analysis from a model of utility maximization and survey data from Faith Community Today 2000, researchers Von Der Ruhr and Daniels demonstrate the efficacy of groups for megachurch growth. Specifically, megachurches use groups to attract and retain members and to demonstrate a commitment to participants. In turn, the church can reasonably expect to see an increase in individual participation and emotional commitment allowing the church to place greater expectations of commitment and demonstration of faith practices on participants. This report provides research support to the consistent finding in my workshop and interviews that an expectation of reciprocal growth and investment from both the participant and church was crucial for developing a sustained sense of belonging and continued spiritual growth. The main question these findings raise is whether the church's programmatic investment is sufficient, or, as I suspect,

if additional relational investment of some kind would further commitment from participants even more.

Appendix 2

Design Workshop Description

My design workshop was held virtually on Tuesday night, October 26, 6-8pm (Central) using Zoom and Google Docs as “white board” space with four stakeholders in attendance. Two additional stakeholders completed a survey with comparable questions in lieu of attending the workshop.

The six stakeholders included two current and one former church staff member who oversee hospitality and connection efforts in both urban and suburban mega churches. The other three are church members (representing small and moderately sized churches) who are actively seeking greater church engagement. There were 2 women, 4 men, who ranged in age from mid-20s to mid-60s. All are protestant Christians with mainline and nondenominational churches represented.

We completed four activities: an icebreaker intended to have stakeholders consider their own experiences of belonging to set the stage for our conversation, Virtual Post-Up comparing and contrasting church and newcomer goals and expectations, Pain/Gain Map using the Anti-Problem approach comparing and contrasting the current approach with the proposed mutually responsive approach, and 3-12-3 seeking concrete ideas for implementing the mutually responsive approach from stakeholders.

I would rate the workshop a 3 because of the limited number of participants in the virtual workshop. Two additional stakeholders had agreed to participate in the workshop—one even contacted me the day of the workshop to say she was excited—but didn’t show up or complete a survey when I reached out afterward. I was also disappointed by the 3-12-3 responses because many were still theoretical instead of concrete ideas like I was requesting and hoping for. This does tell me, though, that it will be important to have specific examples moving forward or people might struggle to grasp the concept.

Additionally, though the overall feedback was helpful, several stakeholders resisted discussing the need for a new approach because they had never experienced (or recognized) negative side effects of the current one. This led to an interesting defensive and protective posture toward current systems and a limited willingness to consider the upside of a new approach. It was good to consider the positives of the current approach, in part because it will impact how I frame future conversations acknowledging both the pros and cons, while continuing to cast vision for something better. It was also a reminder of how deeply personal experiences impact an openness to even theoretical change. This is important when I consider those who could both benefit from and be open to considering an alternative approach.

Finally, there was consistent doubt stated about how to scale an individualized approach as I’m envisioning, largely because most participants had not seen it done before. This was a reminder of

my unique positioning to approach this NPO because I have seen successful individualized scaling in other ministry areas at multiple mega churches, so I know it can be done and have experience to support various best-practice-based implementation methods.

Design Workshop Documentation

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Newcomer: Anyone new to a church body, whether new to Christianity entirely, or simply new to that congregation.

Prescribed Assimilation: This model typically includes prescriptive classes/courses one must take to belong, often with a stated dual focus of learning more about yourself and learning more about the church. These then are taken together to know where one will serve the church. The stated goal is that once one has completed the assigned classes, they are now fully a part of the church body. The primary responsibility for engagement falls on the newcomer and there is a clear beginning and end. Growth Track is a popular and widely used example of this model.

Mutually responsive inclusion: In this model, both the church and newcomer change as a result of being in relationship. The church seeks to learn about the newcomer as the newcomer learns about the church. The goal is full inclusion of the newcomer as a response to the symbiotic relationship that is built with belonging as a starting point, not something to be earned. Responsibility for engagement is shared between newcomer and the church, almost on a sliding scale as the newcomer becomes more comfortable with taking on the role themselves, creating more adaptable, person-specific timelines. There is no widely used example of this model.

WORKSHOP RESPONSES

Brainstorming Activity 1: Icebreaker

Share a time/place where you felt you belonged. Why? How did it make you feel?

Themes/Commonalities: Security, truly known by others, felt free to be ourselves, everyone vulnerable (ie both host and guests), there was an intentionality behind it, quickly felt like a part of something bigger

Brainstorming Activity 2: Virtual Post-Up

1. Goals for newcomers in church (personal responsibility)?
 - Assess the surroundings and learn the environment
 - Check assumptions, but not intuition, at the door
 - Belonging
 - Understand what this community is about

- Find a place to serve & contribute
- Find a community to grow and find purpose in
- To get what they came for (closer relationship with God, healing from past, connection with others)
- Sense of place

2. Ways of engaging newcomers in the church (church responsibility)?

- Create avenues for people to easily make friends, find their crew, and grow
- Know their name, what they like, what they can do
- Learn who they are in a coordinated way (don't just assume someone already met or engaged with them)
- Make it as easy as possible for the newcomer to achieve the personal goals/responsibilities
- Multiple on-ramps for different personalities, stages, needs
- What is the next step?
- Learn the newcomers' story
- Ask what they need

DISCUSSION: theme/trend - gaining understanding/logistics, getting to know people relationally;
alignment: looking for a place to plug in/having a place for people to plug in;

3. How does a newcomer know they belong (personal response)?

- Feel needed and affirmed as if they add value to the community
- Someone remembered me or knew my name, or even knew something about me, the next time I saw them
- People know their name
- Leadership asked to meet for coffee or lunch
- Personal invitation to another activity/gathering/group within the church
- The teaching, community, or conversation connects with the other 6 days of my week

4. How does the church determine someone belongs (church response)?

- They are “well known” or have some kind of visibility
- They meet a need
- They “fit in” with similar viewpoints, status, etc.
- They are interested or seeking opportunities
- They keep coming back

DISCUSSION: themes/trends: being known, We wrote down things we can see, but belonging doesn't really work like that. Even when I DO these things, I still might not belong in the community. Just because someone is volunteering doesn't mean they feel needed. Alignment: people come to church to be needed and to be known, Conflicting: “both sides are waiting for the other to make the first move” There may also be misalignment of goals; people come to church often because they're struggling. When this is the case, it's a miss when the church responds by asking Where can they serve? Instead of How can they heal?; “you're kind of on the outskirts until you're not.” - the assimilation model allows people to immediately know where/how they belong.

5. How does the church bridge newcomer systems with ministry involvement?

- Personal and/or organized efforts to assess newcomers' feelings of inclusion
- Telling the story of what this church is about, who we serve
- One-time service opportunities/events that connect to an ongoing ministry
- Both formal and informal invitations with the community at large. (being “unofficially intentional”) but also having events that are an easier in for people to commit to and hear the story of the church.

6. How do newcomers know what their next steps are?

- Ask what the next steps are
- Communication through volunteers, from the platform, in emails, etc.
- Have really clear pathways, invitations, or goals that everyone understands
- Invitations from people in the community to come alongside them
- Announcements on Sunday morning
- Church website, Facebook
- Showing up and checking things out

- Who will be there? Who do I talk to?
- What commitment level is expected or “expected”?

DISCUSSION: themes/trends: invitations - clear communication; different levels/types of invitations/entrance activities; Alignment: both sides are still assessing - need to have a DTR; Conflicting: invitations to large events difficult because still don’t feel known so cyclical issues; but might also be hesitant to come to smaller events; People are looking for different things, different commitment levels, and different types of events for where they’ll feel most comfortable. Extrovert/Introvert thing? Being treated like a guest when you only want to feel like you belong. “You didn’t have to come!”; needs to be balanced with “Where were you?!”

(Assume it will look like: First I show up and am anonymous, then I meet people, and then I find a place to serve/be involved. But it’s not uncommon for the starting place to be different.)

Brainstorming Activity 3: Pains/Gains/Anti-Problem

1. What happens if someone goes through an assimilation-based model?

Pains:

- Newcomer: My schedule, needs, or stage of life may not fit the median target audience
- Newcomer: Feeling like just a number
- Newcomer: the entry level “sign-up” step can be tall
- Newcomer: Do not see a way for them to feel like they’re “adding value”
- Church: the effort might not be reciprocated
- Church: the model may not be flexible over time and require reassessment
- Church: Do we have enough spots for these people?
- Connection and assimilation doesn’t always happen in a linearly
- Newcomer: Sometimes the invitation just feels like another thing to do and guests can’t always see how it meets the needs they came in for.

Gains:

- Both: Connections, friendships, belongings, and discipleship
- Newcomer: Immediate knowledge of the environment, church, community
- Newcomer: Feeling purpose

- Church: Mobilizing the people of your church to advance the mission
- Newcomer: When done well, the structure can be anxiety-relieving, knowing the next step
- Both: Knowing everyone is on the same page
- At every point, the church and the newcomer both know where we stand (maybe "attendee", "member", "donor")

2. What happens if someone goes through a mutually responsive incorporation-based model?

Pains:

- Both: Paths to assimilation may feel ambiguous. There are more unknowns in the process.
- Church: Requires more man power
- Both: efforts may not be reciprocated because of circumstances--like ships passing in the night
- Is there a risk of relationships being defined in purely social terms? (Or is this a risk the other way too?)
- Both: with unclear expectations, parties may feel like they are putting forth a greater investment with higher risk
- Church: may be difficult to gauge or measure success

Gains:

- Newcomer: Feels their needs are being met immediately
- This process could result in new ministries the insiders would not have known were needed (or possible)
- Newcomer: assimilation is more flexible and tailored
- Church: able to incorporate their members based on talents, skills, passions
- Community could recognize and benefit from what the newcomer already brings to the table
- Church: Better understanding of the individual, not just a class setting
- It's personal and often can feel authentic because it doesn't feel like there's an agenda on either side. Mutual goals are being met.

- Encourages and embraces diversity in the process

DISCUSSION: On MR, it flips from the church's needs being met to the newcomers needs being met; If functioning well, the gains in both are similar; making the assumption that the first way is structured and the second way is not - "If we don't have this structure, then what?"; One has a community pain, the other is just personal pain that they have to deal with on their own - speaks to the required level of investment; We are generally more afraid of the pain we don't know than the one that we do - if expectations are clearly defined people know what pain they're taking on. MR downside would require more manpower because not one and done. Could cause people to shy away from it. How does it scale? Mimics the discipleship model in that everyone would need to experience it to even train (would take more effort and manpower) and harder to control the process. If it's mutual, how does it benefit the community? Current model elevates community over discipleship in the moment, while MR starts with a discipleship model. Discipleship top down.

Brainstorming Activity 4: 3-12-3

In practice, what does mutually responsive incorporation look like? Pitch an alternate approach.

1. Take 3 minutes as a group brainstorming characteristics (nouns and verbs) of Mutually Responsive Incorporation

-Effort and effortless

-Flexible

-Responsive

Ask

Invite

Engage

Listen

Respond

- Connection

- Curiosity

- Authenticity

- Diversity

- Embrace

- Seen

- Courage

2. Take 12 minutes individually using some of the brainstormed characteristics to develop a pitch considering the questions listed under "concept pitch" below.

3. Take up to 3 minutes to give us the pitch

Concept Pitch:

NPO: Provide an alternative approach to welcoming newcomers into the local church body, turning away from prescribed assimilation to mutually responsive inclusion.

Approach:

How are we meeting the need?

How is it different from other approaches?

Risk:

How might it fail?

Assumptions:

What is the critical hypothesis this approach tests?

Benchmark of Success:

How will we know this approach has been successful?

How does this measure of success address the original NPO?

Pitch #1

The NPO meets the needs of newcomers by inquiring of the needs rather than assuming they are just looking for a place to attend church once or twice a week. This is different than other approaches in that the NPO places responsibility on both the newcomer and the church to invest and help define the relationship. *Making sure that each party has the opportunity to add value and then is affirmed when they do is a critical component.* This may fail if communication between parties is unclear or if one or both parties are not gracious and forgiving. The NPO may also fail if one or both parties do not take on their role or responsibility. This tests the hypothesis that if both parties are investing with mutual gain, pain, and change, then the community will be more diverse and fulfilling. *This approach will be viewed as successful when newcomers become "oldcomers."* Attendance may grow and relationships will deepen.

Pitch #2

Meeting the need of the individual in a one on one basis. Spending quality time over a 12 week period to hear their story, assess their need, and walk them through their gifts and passions. This takes them out of the traditional classroom setting and allows them to be open and transparent as they gain trust.

A team that is bought in and faithful is required for this method. If you have people who are on the fence or not 100% in, this will fail and the newcomer will lose interest.

Getting people connected into a deeper relationship with Jesus and watching growth personally and your serving teams growing will show whether or not this is successful

Pitch #3

NPO: Provide an alternative approach to welcoming newcomers into the local church body, turning away from prescribed assimilation to mutually responsive inclusion.

Approach:

How are we meeting the need?

- Theology of the table
- Have a space available for people to meet and connect
- "Dinner parties", "Brig hangs", "Coffee Meet Ups" on the calendar
- It creates space for both the people in the community to come and go deeper and for the church to meet people looking to get more connected

How is it different from other approaches?

- It's more of a personal approach
- It allows for creativity and diversity

Risk:

How might it fail?

- Puts ownership on the host
- Team/leaders is not equipped to do this well
- Commitment from people in the church to own this
- Where do they go from there? Is there a clear next step?

Assumptions:

What is the critical hypothesis this approach tests?

- People want to feel like they belong more than anything else
- The kingdom of God expands around the table and radical acts of hospitality

Benchmark of Success:

How will we know this approach has been successful?

- Do we see people getting plugged into other areas of the church?
- Coming back
- Making friends
- Deepening connections

How does this measure of success address the original NPO?

Pitch #4

Approach:

How are we meeting the need?

- “Medium groups”—bigger and lower-commitment than a small group, smaller than Sunday morning service
 - o Midweek, Sunday night, or Sunday school-hour services/gatherings
 - o Could offer different mixes of worship, teaching, discussion, community
 - o Front porch of community
 - o Intergenerational
 - o Big enough to be comfortably anonymous, small enough to become comfortably less anonymous
 - o Connection, understanding, exploration
- Stage-of-life ministries (young professionals, children/family, youth, men’s women’s) still exist, but shift focus to deeply understand the similar needs of that age group, in whatever context that may occur. This could still involve age-specific gatherings and small groups if that serves the need, could be primarily one-on-one relationships, could be other creative programs.

How is it different from other approaches?

- Intentionally intergenerational

Offers a structure for where, when, and a bit of

the what, but not necessarily the how (because the how is in the interactions

and relationships)

Risk:

How might it fail?

- Hard to offer multiple workable times for everyone who may want to connect in this way

Resources, scheduling, planning

Assumptions:

What is the critical

hypothesis this approach tests?

- Relationships require time and an open-handed approach

Benchmark of Success:

How will we know this

approach has been successful?

- Small groups form from these groups

People connect with ministry/service areas

How does this measure of

success address the original NPO?

- People are becoming connected to one another and to the wider church community
- People are both having their needs met and finding ways to contribute their gifts to meet the needs of others

1-PAGE POST-WORKSHOP MESSAGE TO STAKEHOLDERS

Thank you all again for your help on Tuesday night. It was wonderful to see each of you and the insight you provided will help me tremendously.

As I continue to look into ways to *provide an alternative approach to welcoming newcomers into the local church body, turning away from prescribed assimilation to mutually responsive inclusion*, there are several things that came up repeatedly in our discussions that I'll be keeping top of mind:

- Improve clarity around foundational elements I plan to incorporate into a Mutually Responsive Inclusion model, to include communicated expectations for both the church and the newcomer, benefits for both and needs of both being met, and ideas about general structure (i.e. at a minimum make clear that there *is* still a structure).
- People want to be seen, known, and included, which often comes from serving or being given responsibility. Recognizing this, churches also need to be mindful of where one is on their journey when they arrive and that they might first need someone to walk alongside them in healing/receiving before they're able to serve/give. The model should take into consideration that people's in-road to community is not linear, and no story is the same.
- Risks/pains including scalability, manpower requirements, and potential limitations with it being context specific need to be addressed for the breadth of gains to be fully understood, much less actualized.

I want to include an opportunity for any additional feedback, corrections to my above summary, or if you think there are any blind spots I need to recognize and/or additional areas of study I need to explore.

One-on-One Interviews Documentation

INTERVIEW #1

October 21

- "Jesus knew who he was and knew what he was called to do." To be Christlike, then, is to learn who we are and what we're called to do. What would it look like to center this to a new member approach?
- Could also phrase it: "Jesus knew who he was and knew what he was about."
- We're all pulled between two trees: the knowledge of good and evil, being able to say "I know the answer and what is right and wrong." To define myself as good I have to define a bad necessarily. Yet there is still a pull we have to the tree of life and wholeness.
- Developed "Commissioned" after participating in discovery workshop because was so impacted by the conversation. (Provided Google Doc of Commissioned schedule/structure)
- Importance to have a dual approach of "This is who we are as a church" (i.e. this is what we've been called to do - these are our values, our direction, what makes us unique) while also asking, "who has Jesus made you to be?" Just one or the other misses an important piece of the puzzle.

- Post Conversation Notes: Is the disconnect ultimately that people look at newcomer systems as relational and churches look at them as transactional? We need clarity in communication and alignment in vision. Consider: two-pronged approach – 1. Informative (this is how we follow Jesus (doctrine); This is how we do church (non-essentials) and 2. Engagement (These are the needs we have; what are you bringing to the table/What needs do you have; What can we bring to the table?); Acknowledge and honor the mutual need/synergistic elements of church.

INTERVIEW #2

November 12

- “Are we looking for assimilation or transformation?” When assimilation becomes the focus, you’re in trouble.
- Hates the word “process” in conversations like this – people aren’t meat or technology
- Whatever is developed, needs to be offered in person and on demand. Addresses different personality types and digital/analog world.
- *“We need to approach people more like a school counselor and less like the DMV.”* Both have clear purposes, only one actually sees people as individuals as they seek to help.
- Dad taught a membership class that was 16 weeks with each covering one of 16 points of doctrine. Asked, “is this a membership class or endurance test?”
- This approach is more of an indoctrination asking, “do you believe what we do?” INSTEAD, we should be asking, “are you headed the same way I’m headed?” or “Do we share the same vision?” (note: greater focus on direction/trajectory than already being the same)
- “Connect, grow, serve” is not discipleship.
- *“We’re not given raw materials.” We’re all starting out at different places so identical processes aren’t effective.* If try to apply a one-size-fits-all, your end results will be disappointing and neither party will feel like they got out of it what expected.
- *Present direction, beliefs, cultural values. AND talk to person about where they’ve been, where now, where do you want to go?* Then an individual response can be: “Here is a good fit,” OR “Here is not a good fit,” and then we can provide recs for where a better fit might be. Best option for everyone.
- Worth exploring the giftedness of individual churches vs. all churches in the area working together. Could a church strong in mission lead other churches, too? The church strong in investing in homelessness lead that charge while bringing other churches along. Childcare, etc. (note: Next interview raised questions about the value of intra-church coordination, too)

- Current church as “Owner’s Class” as newcomer course: “Members have rights, Owners have responsibilities” ASKED, “But isn’t Jesus the owner of the church??” How do we communicate responsibilities without skewing our role and whose church it is?
- We need to ask if our policies/requirements are reactionary or planned? (note: this ties into flexibility, importance of why/what communication and alignment)
- Growth Track – this process fails at the point where it switches to individual responsibility. !!!!!
- If video membership class, make sure the right people are in the video – People want to know who is in charge, to interact with the leader of their church/campus, and the story of the church needs to be told by the person who lived the story (“Have the senior pastor tell the origin story”). A Central leader is not the person to tell the story because you’re already communicating a lack of interest/investment in those who are new. And a surrogate cannot tell it as well.
- Nona Jones (Facebook) – says right now ministry is 168 hours a week. We eliminate people if we’re only offering on-ramps at specific times.
- A good model he’s seen: Every person who becomes a member has an interview with an elder at the church – Like meeting with a personal Trainer at a new gym – “you know about us, now let’s learn about you.”
- Provides 2 weeks for those he’s interacted with officially to reach out to him, but if 2 weeks pass and he doesn’t hear back, he reaches out. 100% participation with this model. Had to develop a team to interview.
 - Tracking people from the initial step was the hard part.
- What do you do with those who have radical beliefs? – Have direct conversations and make sure they know how to function within the congregation. *For these we might not want assimilation before inculturation.* (note: but where is the line? What constitutes radical beliefs?)
- Note: All of these are very similar to NCC small group requirements/leadership onboarding structure – I’ve done this!
- The church has a responsibility to say “this is available” but the person needs to take the next steps. But, need to have a conversation saying, “we want to know you” because otherwise you’ll intuit: “our presence is enough” (i.e. no need to truly engage) or say, “I don’t even know how to become a member!” (i.e. despite desire to engage, the way forward isn’t clear) (note: Might need to take this even farther back than I assumed: might be less of an alternative approach and asking more, “do you have an approach at all??”)

- Need to ask/provide clear answers for:
 - How do you know who is new?
 - How do you become a member?
 - How do you connect them? Does this change as they become engaged?
 - How are we helping people transition from 'solving their problems' to walking with them as they learn to solve their own?
 - How are we communicating the member responsibility to connect? Do we first show them how?
 - How does one know they belong? (note: this was a key NPO question)
- Need to be able to triage based on background because you can't treat everyone the same way. "Like with parenting, you can't play favorites but you also can't treat everyone the same."
- Churches where you're not saved if you're not a member would need a different approach. Those with "Closed Communion", too (note: need to adjust idea of who this is for. Also note various meanings of "closed communion" in this context)
- I need to ask, "Where are people wandering in saying, "how do I connect?" instead of knowing what to expect because you grew up there/in that tradition. THESE ARE MY TARGET AUDIENCE.
- For churches without membership, what are people joining?
- *Pastors think about what the church needs instead of what members need.*
- Remember: "This is not something we're doing to people"
- We need to ask people "what is your felt need?" then say, "here is a plan to achieve it" (note: opposite approach and comfort level with a more individualized approach than next interview. Growth mindset and willingness to loosen some control are both requirements.
- "We need to deputize small groups" - this multiplies yourself. (note: need to include question about who in your church now can become part of your official or unofficial welcome team? Is this a church-wide posture and expectation or only owned by a few? Because that will be felt by those who walk through the doors.)
- "We need to be prepared to guide them, develop them, and each will be at a different stage." (a parenting approach)

- Post Conversation Notes: need to pay attention to similarities with my small group leadership structuring/scaling experience. This is almost a one-for-one approach. Importance of individual care and response - this is scalable, don't be scared off by those who haven't seen it done, because you've not only seen it, you've done it.)

INTERVIEW #3

November 21

- "Is what we're promising what they're actually receiving?" - this was the question that most hit home and is worth honing it on.
- What would it look like for paraministries to be supported by multiple churches so resources are shared - ex: divorce care for all churches in the county meet here, vs attempting DC in every church.
- There are advantages to franchise models (note: need to name pros and cons in final project to acknowledge understanding)
- Asking "Tell us what you need?" instead of "Tell us what we need?" shifts roles, who is giving what?, You give up complete control which many churches don't want.
- "10 Week Group" gives all new groups/leaders a set structure for leading - *it teaches the participants how to be in a group as much as it supports the leader*
 - Explain lingo
 - Provides expectation management
- *Find the areas where you can be flexible within your structure.*
- Programming can cause confusion when they compete against each other. What does the church actually value? Where am I actually supposed to invest? What is expected of me? - Can lead to mixed messages being received.
- "Are we promising a tailor-made solution to everything?" (note: need to adjust language to ensure this isn't the assumption for my NPO. There is a lot of space between 'tailor-made' and 'prescriptive assimilation' - How do I communicate a third way?)
- Are things explained in a way that they make sense? Communication is key, both in the meaning and the application - there needs to be alignment.
- Post Conversation Notes: Importance of finding areas for flexibility within structure: maybe consider a 'must have' 'nice to have' 'suggestions but be creative here' breakdown?; Importance of alignment in communication, programming, vision - provide what you say you'll provide but don't provide too many options to muddy the waters; highlighted the

value of franchise model which isn't the first time hearing that - need to find clear and succinct way to explain why and alternative approach is worthwhile - value in franchise model is ease and thinking done for them: do I need to develop alternative there or lean into the third way approach? Third way fits vision better.

INTERVIEW #4

November 29

- Developed 'Discipleship Next Steps' Method. Both mode and model. Intentionally used a descriptive name so people knew what it was without it needing to be explained.
- Modes of discipleship: student, ministry school, Groups are the primary mode of discipleship, and this is what created community and belonging.
- Developed tools that are used top/down - "we need to invest and disciples because if not, what are we doing here??"
- Primary tool has a 3-step process:
 - 1. Celebration - we need to recognize growth not just focus on the next step. Church provides options of things to call out - make it simple for leaders to follow
 - 2. Identification of Spiritual Gifts - call them out in people which helps them feel known and is also used to call them up. *a synergistic approach
 - 3. What's next? - Examples include joining another group, ministry school, Best ways to put gifts into practice, could also call out a struggle and provide help/ways to address
- ICNU are the most powerful letters in the alphabet ("I see in you")
- Need to create a pyramid and be the primary modeler of what you're asking people to do. Also ensure you're asking for a management amount of commitment. Constantly state the importance of what you're doing. The WHY behind the WHAT.
- *"Project what you want to protect in your culture."*
- Everyone has a next step: *We're never done growing and we're never done investing.*
 - The growing is the member's responsibility, the investing is the church's. The church can't forget it's role.
- Many leaders in the church are like middle management - given a lot of responsibility but no access to staff resources, etc - when the middle leaders are ignored we're failing them and miscommunicating the gospel.

- Discipleship wasn't a part of the culture (at least not associated with small groups) but was able to make groups and discipleship synergistic.
- "As we steward the growth, we need to center culture." Numbers are less important than the investment in and growth of people.
- It's hard to change cultural norms - you need to be so committed to the vision that you're willing to release people who aren't able or willing to change as the church does.
- COVID was the sifting - it helped reveal those who were "cultural Christians" but it was able to do so quickly and thoroughly because there was already a high focus on discipleship and investment pre-COVID. It sped the inevitable up.
- Cast vision repeatedly - language shifts help because in language there is an expectation: "You are kind" "calling group leaders 'disciple makers' in all communication instead"
- Almost oversold discipleship (note: reminds me of advertising adage - if you're not tired of saying it there is no way others have heard it enough)
- This became part of the culture in micro and macro ways. They didn't discuss next steps, role of discipleship in groups, etc just at the end or launch time but throughout the experience. (note: group structure like NCC's)
- Provided a "Leader's Corner" with resources and also to remind them that "they have leaders in their corner"
- The Bridge from visitor to invested/included member: in the newcomer class you're able to get to know your campus leaders personally and they're able to get to know you while they tell you about the church and how to get involved. BUT it's a two way street because some start in groups and their "next step" is to attend newcomer's class. They refer to each other so it's a two-way bridge.
- Important to always go back to the 'why' behind the 'what'
 - Explain that groups and newcomer class both exist in part to allow the person to be known, possibly to show them where to serve, to better connect with the church.
 - You cannot over explain the 'why'
- *"There is no case so compelling it negates the need for explanation."*
- Need to invest so all leaders understand the 'why' and can communicate it themselves. Pass the understanding of 'why' down the line so everyone is spreading the same vision.
- It's cyclical, no necessarily linear.

- Represents a synergistic relationship.
- Post Conversation Notes: focus on culture shift – need clear vision casting, someone to tirelessly champion, and continued communication; The synergistic relationship has clear responsibilities of each party that are communicated – you grow, we invest; Always explain the why behind the what, so even if there are elements of your structure others might not understand, you’re explaining the bigger picture/reasoning behind it which makes it easier to get on board and lets them into the community’s thinking.

Ideas:

- How to provide what you promise and promise what you’ll provide
- Importance of why/what communication, clarity, and alignment
- Clarity and communication of roles and responsibilities
- Power behind idea, “we’re never done investing”
- Need to develop a structure that focuses on the individual while still being scalable and communicates vision.
- Applying the “Mutually Responsive Parenting” approach into this is still worth pursuing.

Appendix D—Milestone 4 Design Research Report

Prototype Summaries and Findings

‘Mind the Gap’ Book

- **Prototype Description:** The prototype represents a book exploring the causes and impact of churches ignoring the ‘forgotten middle’ of their congregation (new members who have completed the assimilation programming but aren’t prepared for full self-directed engagement) and the possible solutions and the benefits of providing for this group. The prototype includes a complete introduction and a full table of contents with brief descriptions of each chapter, with two chapters more fully outlined.
- **NPO Statement:** Despite guided assimilation processes, new church members feel abandoned when moved immediately to self-directed engagement. Providing for their unique needs increases their sense of belonging and commitment.
- **Research question:** What would happen if the Church recognized the gap between the assimilation process and full engagement and sought to address it?
- **Assessment benchmark:** Substantive feedback from participants (feedback that marks engagement with the content) and at least 50% of those who provide feedback express an interest in buying and reading the completed book.
- **Participant description:** There were six participants, age 30s-60s, who are all lead or executive pastors representing both mainline and non-denominational churches, single and multi-site, with active membership ranging from around 50 to 10,000.
- **Learning Summary:** The respondent feedback was largely enthusiastic and encouraging. There was a positive reaction to the question-based format with several mentioning the open-ended approach and pushback against “quick fixes” as strengths. The one respondent who wasn’t sold on the concept pushed back because she questioned whether the “middle group” even exists. Ironically, this provided a stark contrast to those who celebrated the book for giving voice to a group who wasn’t likely to speak for themselves and addressed an awareness and conversational gap in the church, highlighting the need for my research to be shared. The most encouraging element of the feedback, however, is how it encouraged curiosity, tangents of semi-related thoughts, and suggestions for related research, indicating that respondents were fully engaged and invested.

One respondent suggested reordering the chapters, starting with the problem first, then providing the relevant background and support. This approach would allow me to start by addressing the element that became a stumbling block to another, keeping her from considering or fully engaging the content at all. I also like the suggestion to provide more extensive research on how organizations outside the church build belonging because they will provide helpful case studies and structurally will create balance with the outside examples used to explain the “forgotten middle.”

The respondents cared that *Mind the Gap* would be beneficial for the church and members alike, supporting efforts already in place, specifically as they reassess after COVID. Responding well to the moment for the good of their churches and potential new members was also a central theme guiding their feedback.

- Most important discovery: Most of the responses touched on the value of this being widely applicable because of the question-based focus. This highlighted the need to better balance the theoretical concepts with practical application, ultimately creating a more holistic tool for the church.

‘Known’ Small Group Study

- Prototype description: The prototype represents a small group curriculum to be used in place of current assimilation programs, integrating typical assimilation and next-step content with a focus on shared communication on mission, vision, and what differentiates them for both participants and the church, so at the end the church is known, and the participants feel known. The prototype includes the curriculum’s table of contents with summaries of each section and explanation of the benefits of each, a full introduction, and a list of supporting resources with summaries of each.
- NPO Statement: Despite guided assimilation processes, new church members feel abandoned when moved immediately to self-directed engagement. Providing for their unique needs increases their sense of belonging and commitment.
- Research question: How do we bridge the gap between the assimilation process and full engagement in the church?
- Assessment benchmark: Substantive feedback from participants (feedback that marks engagement with the content) and at least 50% of those who provide feedback express an interest in implementing the program.
- Participant description: There were five participants, age 20s to 60s, including current and former pastors and lay leaders who oversee welcome ministries in their churches, representing single and multi-site non-denominational churches with active membership ranging from around 50 to 10,000.
- Learning Summary: The respondents were overwhelmingly supportive of *Known*, responding well to content, the updated approach to welcoming and integrating members, and the mutual vulnerability of the church and participants. Several respondents mentioned a current need for “a product like this” because there is an existing gap or urgent need, suggesting an exciting openness and desire for a product like *Known*. Further, the appeal of *Known* to representatives of varied church sizes and expressions is encouraging.

The most frequent suggestion for improvements was to reconsider the order of the sessions to better align with the stated vision and to center participant comfort. There were also reminders that

participants will have various backgrounds and faith experiences, to include some already engaging in service or discipleship programs within the current church. Keeping this front of mind will lead to more inclusive language, examples, and require a nuanced approach that is accessible for someone brand new to faith and church community yet engaging enough, and not talking down to, those who have a long history of faith and church commitment.

Several respondents highlighted the benefit it could have on participants and the church, indicating that they, too, see the mutual benefit of a mutual investment. It was encouraging that what seems to matter most is desiring positive participant experiences. Relatedly, several mentioned the timeliness of a product like *Known* as churches are reevaluating or revamping their programs following the impact of COVID on congregations.

- Most important discovery: There is a strong desire for reimagined welcome programs/systems in the wake of COVID's impact on churches. Specifically, the renewed awareness of the need for relationship-based programs that center belonging and connection more than check-the-box formalities creates a favorable environment for *Known*.

Background Research Essay on the Emerging Solution

Sandwiched between participants of fully guided assimilation processes and church members who have become comfortable with self-directed engagement in the church, there is a middle group made up of new members who no longer require total direction but do not yet have the experience or understanding of the church systems to successfully navigate and engage autonomously. The new member stage is often overlooked and is therefore not acknowledged as a discrete experience requiring unique recognition and care.

To better understand the distinctive needs of this group and how to best address them—whether as created by the current methods or to ‘design out of the system’ in a newly developed newcomers group study—additional research is needed in several areas: exploring the implications of the widespread occurrence of the “forgotten middle,” developing a better understanding of how to harness the connections storytelling can create, and investigating how change management practices can aid churches in adjusting their current systems in response to a greater understanding of new member needs.

Forgotten Middle

The greatest need for additional research is to better understand the phenomenon of the forgotten middle. Though the unique needs of new members in the middle stage have not been widely explored, the concept of the “forgotten middle” is not exclusive to the church. Sometimes referred to as the “missing middle,” which is a misnomer because they’re not missing, just ignored, this

concept appears in discussions about middle America, middle income¹⁰², middle voters, middle children; found across various sectors, there has been extensive research on this population that will provide applicable lessons to the church about the needs and potential ways to provide for those in the middle.

The most relevant studies for my purposes are those looking at child development, school children, college students, and middle-skill workers. Child development specialists tend to focus research efforts on early childhood and adolescence, creating a forgotten middle childhood that is less understood despite being a time of great cognitive, social, emotional, and physical advancements.¹⁰³ In schools, the forgotten middle are the B and C students who do not require the extra focus struggling students do, but also do not show the same level of promise as exceptional students, the two groups who also receive the most attention and federal funding.¹⁰⁴ Practically, this means B and C students are not provided instruction that is tailored to their abilities or needs.¹⁰⁵ This is also seen with part-time law students who are “seemingly irrelevant” despite representing a significant and growing population, with law schools instead focusing their attention on full-time students.¹⁰⁶ We continue to see this beyond school years with the forgotten middle worker; those in middle-skill occupations that require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year college degree who are overlooked by policymakers and others investing in education.¹⁰⁷

Looking at some of the characteristics of those in the middle and the impact of their being unnoticed can provide a helpful starting point for application in the church. Middle childhood marks a child’s transition from being dependent to taking an active role within their family and

¹⁰² Caroline Pearson et al, “The Forgotten Middle: Many Middle-Income Seniors Will Have Insufficient Resources for Housing and Health Care.” *Health Affairs* 38, no. 5 (2019): 851.

¹⁰³ Kandice K. Mah and E. Lee Ford-Jones, “Spotlight on Middle Childhood: Rejuvenating the ‘Forgotten Years.’” *Paediatrics & Child Health* 17, no. 2 (February 2012): 81. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pch/17.2.81>.

¹⁰⁴ Mary Catherine Swanson, “It’s Time to Focus on the Forgotten Middle (Opinion).” *Education Week* (February 2019).

¹⁰⁵ Dave Gardner, “The B Students.” *Northeast Pennsylvania Business Journal* 26, no. 9 (2011): 58.

¹⁰⁶ Andrew M. Francis and Iain W. McDonald, “Part-Time Law Students: The Forgotten Cohort?” *The Law Teacher* 39, no. 3 (September 2010): 277–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069400.2005.9993188>.

¹⁰⁷ Ann Pace, “The Forgotten Middle Worker.” *T+D* 63, no.9 (2009): 20.

community which has lifelong effects on social, emotional, and mental wellbeing.¹⁰⁸ This mirrors the transition we hope to see and facilitate in new church members, which likewise is a time of great growth that can be squandered if not understood and aided. In school, the “silent majority” are overlooked, despite being described as, “kids who come to school regularly, sit in the back of the class, rarely say anything, don’t cause trouble, and get by with C’s.... They are nearly invisible.”¹⁰⁹ Because parents and teachers are content with middle-of-the-road performance, they’re missing that students are not receiving the instruction they need. For law students, pedagogical research is focused almost entirely on those attending full-time, with even programs created specifically to address the needs of part-time students quickly reverting to a general legal education focus, creating a gap in the understanding of what part-time students require.¹¹⁰

Though each of these forgotten middle populations studied still exist, efforts made to address them can provide creative springboards to addressing it within the church. Studies of middle childhood have revealed that encouraging involvement in activities increases self-confidence which has a cyclical effect of encouraging greater agency and involvement in more activities.¹¹¹ When schools began to acknowledge the unique needs of ‘B students’ and provided tailored instruction and resources, the student’s academic performance improved,¹¹² and were bolstered more by tailored support structures integrated into the regular day.¹¹³ Part-time law students desired direct contact with professors and other students.¹¹⁴ They were also benefited by a realization that though part-time students, as a group, are heterogenous, they still had common needs that were distinctly different than those of full-time students,¹¹⁵ and middle workers were aided by career-pathways specific to them.¹¹⁶ Each finding supports the benefit of creating dedicated discipleship pathways for those in the middle of the church.

¹⁰⁸ Mah and Ford-Jones, “Spotlight on Middle Childhood: Rejuvenating the ‘Forgotten Years,” 82.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Francis and McDonald, “Part-Time Law Students: The Forgotten Cohort?” 282.

¹¹¹ Mah and Ford-Jones, “Spotlight on Middle Childhood: Rejuvenating the ‘Forgotten Years,” 83.

¹¹² Gardner, “The B Students,” 58.

¹¹³ Swanson, “It’s Time to Focus on the Forgotten Middle (Opinion).” 2019.

¹¹⁴ Francis and McDonald, “Part-Time Law Students: The Forgotten Cohort?” 279.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 283.

¹¹⁶ Pace, “The Forgotten Middle Worker,” 20.

Storytelling

The success of both prototypes' rests on effective storytelling. Both also use questions to help develop these stories of what is or what could be. Stories connect us and build trust¹¹⁷ and questions have a transformative quality that not only establish connections that are deeper than those formed by other conversational practices, but also have the potential to elicit change.¹¹⁸ We're always telling stories¹¹⁹ in part because they help us learn to make sense of the world.¹²⁰ Employing the power of stories will help both churches and newcomers to better understand each other and allow churches to imagine possibilities that address an issue that might be new to them.

Imagining new possibilities can be difficult in a world where churches have become more and more homogenous,¹²¹ supporting the assumption that systems and programs are applicable in all contexts. When the church adopts plug-and-play systems developed for another context it can fall prey to formulaic expression, or the "McDonaldization" of the Church,¹²² furthering the idea that there is, and should be, a uniform church experience. Conversely, focusing on stories highlights what makes each church, and everyone in it, unique.

One person who provided feedback was unable to move past the fact that she hadn't experienced the new member stage as presented in the prototype and therefore doubted whether it existed at all. This doubt created a blockage that kept her from even considering the reality of new members as a unique group much thereby eliminating an openness to the need to address it. She repeatedly stated that she needed data and studies to support the insistence that this group existed, which, as already discussed, doesn't exist. What does exist, however, are stories. Specifically, stories that celebrate our differences and commonalities,¹²³ allowing the reader to safely move beyond their

¹¹⁷ Rob Biesenbach, *Unleash the Power of Storytelling: Win Hearts, Change Minds, Get Results* (Evanston, IL: Eastlawn Media, 2018).

¹¹⁸ Will Wise and Chad Littlefield, *Ask Powerful Questions: Create Conversations That Matter* (Highland Park, IL: Round Table Companies, 2017).

¹¹⁹ Matthew Dicks, *Storyworthy: Engage, Teach, Persuade, and Change Your Life Through the Power of Storytelling* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2018).

¹²⁰ Rance Greene, *Instructional Story Design: Develop Stories That Train* (Alexandria, VA: ATD Press, 2020).

¹²¹ Bill Bishop and Robert G. Cushing, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing US Apart* (Mariner Books, 2009).

¹²² John W. Drane, *The McDonaldization of the Church: Consumer Culture and the Church's Future* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2012).

¹²³ The Moth et al, *How to Tell a Story: The Essential Guide to Memorable Storytelling from The*

personal context and consider experiences that aren't their own. Beyond helping people just believe others' experiences, stories can be catalytic events, presenting information and raising awareness of an issue that was previously ignored, misunderstood, or unrecognized, ultimately inspiring change.¹²⁴

Before inspiring change, though, a story must be developed. Using concepts developed for global church leadership training, understanding one's own community and personal context is imperative when seeking to connect with others,¹²⁵ because understanding your story helps you understand your life.¹²⁶ That communal and personal understanding does not always happen organically, however, so questions can be used to help raise awareness, creating the foundation of the story. Even when personal context is generally understood, it is common for organizations to "describe themselves as something very different than what they are," another practice that can be aided by guided questions discussed in a group.¹²⁷ Questions also encourage self-reflection and consideration of the past, allowing a more truthful story to emerge.¹²⁸

Once a more realistic story is understood and shared, there is groundwork established for genuine connections and a real sense of belonging. As positive as these things are, however, organizations, including the church, can struggle to embrace a newly understood identity and the necessary changes this awareness elicits. Applying change management principles is one way to acknowledge the hardships created and aid the next steps desired by those in the church who now understand more about themselves, or about those they serve, and want to address the issues to which they're newly enlightened.

Change Management

Although the changes suggested in the two prototypes are systemic and programmatic, they ultimately rely on people. Change management looks at the people side of change which

Moth (New York, NY: Crown, 2022).

¹²⁴ Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation 2.0: Moving Communities Into Unity, Wholeness and Justice*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2020), 46.

¹²⁵ Joseph Nehemiah, *Leadership Training in the Hands of the Church: Experiential Learning and Contextual Practices in North Africa and the Middle East*. Carlisle, (UK: Langham Global Library, 2021).

¹²⁶ Matthew Dicks, *Storyworthy: Engage, Teach, Persuade, and Change Your Life Through the Power of Storytelling*, (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2018).

¹²⁷ Radim Malinic, *Book of Branding: A Guide to Creating Brand Identity for Startups and Beyond*. (Brand Nu, 2019), 42.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

helps support those overseeing the change prepare for resistance.¹²⁹ Anne Lamont sums up the reason for our natural resistance to change when she writes, "new is scary, and new can be disappointing, and confusing—we had this all figured out, and now we don't."¹³⁰ Organizational change specialist Edgar Schein furthers this idea by suggesting that although organizations resist change because it creates anxiety, that same anxiety is needed for learning to happen.¹³¹ Because of the difficult response change, even good change, can induce, it is necessary for an organization to create a sense of safety in the process, because otherwise the pull to return to what is familiar is too great.¹³² Demonstrating the symbiotic relationship of these elements, storytelling has been shown to create a safe space in part by establishing a common narrative that exists in the midst of everyone's different narratives.¹³³ Once both the anxiety and safety are present, the stage is set for change to occur.

Since change is assumed to be scary, disappointing, confusing, anxiety inducing, and requires a safe space to happen, it is easy to understand why change can be so hard. Further, real change requires more than understanding the new idea, it requires transformation of behaviors and beliefs to support and sustain the change.¹³⁴ Sociologist Damon Centola's research helped establish the field of study looking at the impact of social networking on change. Through this he's discovered the common conception that the most socially influential people (celebrities, social media influencers, or politicians, for example) will have the greatest impact at generating change is wrong. Instead, it is more likely to be those on the "fringe" who create the greatest change because they're more likely to adopt new behaviors and ideas and the spread happens organically through pre-established relationships. Not only that, but Centola also found that highly socially connected people are less likely to accept the legitimacy of new behaviors or ideas and as a result require seeing many others adopting a new idea before they will.¹³⁵ This research brings awareness that

¹²⁹ Jeff Hiatt and Timothy J. Creasey, *Change Management: The People Side of Change* (Loveland, CO: Prosci Learning Center Publications, 2012).

¹³⁰ Ann Lamont, *Help, Thanks, Wow* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2012), 86.

¹³¹ Diane Coutu, "Edgar Schein: The Anxiety of Learning - The Darker Side of Organizational Learning," *Harvard Business Review* (March 2002)

¹³² Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation 2.0: Moving Communities Into Unity, Wholeness and Justice*, 56.

¹³³ Russell Haitch and Donald Miller, "Storytelling As a Means of Peacemaking: A Case Study of Christian Education in Africa," *Religious Education* 101, no. 3, (2006), 396-7.

¹³⁴ Damon Centola, *Change: How to Make Big Things Happen*, (London, UK: John Murray, 2022), 6.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 15

early adoption by the most connected or recognized people isn't necessary for acceptance of change, shifting the understanding of who is truly an "influencer."

Though change doesn't require early adoption by the most connected to be successful, seeking participation from everyone impacted by the change is shown to limit resistance and increase overall acceptance.¹³⁶ Further establishing the importance of questions and storytelling, asking questions and seeking to understand the contexts, concerns, and stories of those impacted by changes allows those leading the change to both build support and provide support, raising the chances of a change's success.¹³⁷ Acknowledging the full impact a change will have on the organization and the people who make up the organization builds trust and ultimately leads to greater buy-in.

Conclusion

Focused research on the characteristics of those in the forgotten middle, the impact of stories, and change management will enhance the continued project for either prototype. Each research element highlights the importance of people, centering those who are served by, leading, or impacted by the proposed systemic and organizational changes. Refocusing energy on those these changes are intended to support allows for a holistic reminder and recentering of the "why" behind the work.

MVP (Most Viable Prototype)

The feedback for both prototypes was positive and indicated related gaps that each could help fill yet would ultimately be best addressed with a combination approach. Because of this, my MVP is a hybrid of *Mind the Gap* and *Known*. The hybrid approach will center on the book and include a condensed version of the *Known* study and an additional companion resource intended to aid the reader in moving from a theoretical understanding to a practical application. All three will follow a question-based format.

I'll focus primarily on *Mind the Gap* because it offers the data and research-driven theoretical foundation. It also, however, creates a felt need for a resource like the *Known* study as readers consider what making the suggested posture shifts could look like practically. The condensed version of *Known* could take several forms, including being integrated into the book, with applicable sections included at the end of each chapter, holistically included as an appendix, or as a separate chapter at the end of the book. or it could remain a standalone study. The companion

¹³⁶ Thomas Lauer, Participation as a Success Factor: Involving Those Affected. In: *Change Management*, (Springer, Germany, 2021), 145. https://doi-org.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/978-3-662-62187-5_9

¹³⁷ Ibid., 152.

resource will likely follow whatever form *Known* ends up taking. Regardless of format, the goal is for each product to be able to stand on its own, yet will be designed to be used most effectively in tandem.

The companion resource is a response to the positive feedback to the concept of a question-based book. Building upon that enthusiasm in a way that also addresses some of the questions that were raised, the companion resource will follow the same questions guiding the book chapters, but will refocus the broad questions to be applied directly to the readers' context. Taken together, the three-pronged approach will address theoretical, structural, and programmatic considerations uncovered in my research.

Appendix 3

Mind the Gap: How paying attention to those in the middle increases a sense of belonging, establishes mutual commitment, and leads to longevity and connectedness in the church

Introduction

In 1968 the London Underground started issuing verbal and visual warnings to passengers to pay attention to the space between the station platform and the train's floor. Though small, ignoring this space could have dangerous implications, so riders were told to 'mind the gap.' This reminder provided a constant prompt to pay attention to the space between the two primary foundations found in the train station and on the train. Now used by transit systems around the world, riders are reminded every day to notice the gap that without the cue they could easily overlook.

The church tends to emphasize its internally focused energy in two areas: hospitality and assimilation structures for newcomers and potential new members, and discipleship programming for integrated church members. Stuck in between newcomers and integrated members is a third, middle group that many churches ignore, or, worse, don't even recognize is there. This group is no longer served by the highly directed, step-by-step programming of newcomer courses, but includes many who are still not quite ready to jump into the self-directed, church-wide programmatic offerings. PNM is a widely used acronym for 'potential new member,' but the middle group doesn't have a name. To fix this, I'd like to propose MIA: Members In search of Acceptance. Like teenagers who no longer need the hand holding or direct intervention from their parents but are not quite ready to take on the full responsibilities of adulthood and are desperate for confirmation of acceptance, MIAs exist between the newcomers and integrated church member stage and need reassurance that they belong.

When the church fails to recognize MIAs, we miss opportunities to tailor an approach that instills a sense of belonging and commitment, ensures alignment of the expectations of new members and the church, and reinforces and guides them through becoming a fully integrated member. This failure of recognition and direct care creates a sense of abandonment in this middle group that discourages further engagement in self-directed efforts. And this is the crux of the issue—MIAs consistently question if they belong and are in a liminal season that requires extra care. Because when they know they belong, their commitment and engagement levels grow; when they question it, engagement drops, attendance becomes scattered, and nascent commitment levels aren't enough to keep trying. It's as if they're asking, *why try if I'm not really wanted?*

Commented [1]: I love this metaphor

Commented [2]: Good opening metaphor!

Commented [3]: Or even skipping right over that and providing robust leadership development that doesn't look a lot different than what you might find in any business context. Wondering how we might see discipleship as a continuum that stretches from the realm of first impressions/hospitality/evangelism world right on through to the highest levels of leadership development.

Commented [4]: I like this a lot, but do wonder if there is too much association with Missing in Action. Also, is there a shorthand for the "connected/integrated" member? GAP = "growing at pace"? "groping around (for a) place"?

Commented [5]: I like how this also parallels the original meaning of MIA, missing in action, because they are probably somewhat active and yet still missing full inclusion.

Commented [6]: Again, this is a great picture of what this season needs.

Commented [7]: Who is your target audience? In the Methodist Church, we have confirmation for students around 6th grade, where they attend a class for a few months and then get confirmed and officially join as full members. However, unless they are heavily involved in youth group, they are still in that "in the middle" phase where they get ignored. But it might be worth mentioning that some denominations have ways to officially join that age, even if it's not super effective.

Commented [8]: Are you familiar with Joseph Myer's book, Search to Belong? It's about the four concentric circles of belonging and could have some helpful ideas. It's not an academic book but is rooted in researched sociology and psychology.

Commented [9]: For MIA's what kind of statistical or studied proof is there regarding this grouping?

Commented [10]: We saw this all the time in YWAM. After the "school" i.e. DTS, etc...phase, people were added to staff, going from highly structured and ordered to almost entirely self directed. Lots of negative outcomes with this.

We know they're wanted, but is that being effectively communicated by our current structures or who gets our attention?

Commented [11]: Yes, everything communicates all the time

It can be tempting to hear about a problem and want to jump right in to fix it, but there is a benefit to taking a moment to ask some follow up questions that will ultimately guide next steps. That is where this book comes in. Because the "fix" will look different in each context, this book isn't a how-to guide, but rather a question guide, though the paths will be unique, the questions are pretty standard. Put another way, this is a book driven by questions, not answers. It's also context agnostic so the questions are applicable to most churches regardless of size, location, or denomination. It's not a fill-in-the-blank, one-size-fits-all, approach either. As tempting as those are, most don't work. You already have a culture, vision, values, mission statements, and immovable objects that cannot shift each time your strategy does. This means when new ideas are brought in, they're rarely fully adopted, and you never fully adapt. This approach is different.

Commented [12]: This is great. We need more question guides. Questions were the space of learning in 1st century rabbinic Judaism.

Commented [13]: Answered one of my previous questions.

You're the expert on your church—I trust that and you should, too. You likely already have a welcome strategy and a discipleship plan; Great! Keep up the good work because the approach in this book isn't intended to require an overhaul of everything you're doing. But it is intended to get you thinking about a group of church members who are often overlooked by asking questions that will allow you to consider your current strategies and programming, identify potential areas to revamp, and establish a mutual relationship built on commitment and trust. Some of the questions we'll dive into include: What characteristics mark MIAs? Is it actually important to address? If so, what is required of the church if we do? Can we expect a real benefit? In other words, is this effort worth it? And, at the root of it all, how do we mind the gap?

Sample Table of Contents

Introduction – Why should the church recognize or care about MIAs?

Ch. 1 – History of Hospitality in the Church – *What can we learn from ancient practices?*

- o A belief that all people are God's image bearers informs the way we practice hospitality, the act of turning a stranger into a guest. But who is the stranger? As co-humans, one trait we share is that we are all strangers in this land, being shown hospitality—being welcomed as guests—by God. Since God is showing each of us hospitality, we, too, should in turn show hospitality to each other.

Commented [14]: So much fantastic learning in this space. Particularly from the monastic communities.

Commented [15]: I would consider expanding this to look not just at early church practice but also the ancient Jewish world— so many examples of Old Testament hospitality. We find God's power, provision, promise and protection show up over and over again in the experience of hospitality- for both the giver and the receiver.

Imago Dei centered hospitality is central to the gospel and practices of the early church.

- The early church followed basic guidelines: teach what you know to an ever-growing group, expanding your communion with God, and the expression of individual gifts is honoring to God and necessary for the healthy function of the church. As the faithful were brought in, not only were they expected to teach others what they had been taught, they were integrated into the life of the church in a way that honored their gifts, because ultimately, celebrating their abilities was a recognition of the imago Dei in each one. Assimilation, defined as, "the process of receiving new facts or of responding to new situations in conformity with what is already available to consciousness," wasn't the goal. **Inclusion didn't seek to conform, but to integrate.**

Ch. 2 – Jesus and Hospitality – *What does Jesus's approach to hospitality teach us?*

- Integration was necessary because **Jesus' disciples represented a wide variety of backgrounds and personality types. They were not part of the same group before each choosing to follow Jesus.** When he invited them to join him, however, he didn't say to each one, "become just like me," he said, "follow me." Jesus' approach to relationships provides the clearest example of how the church is to practice hospitality and inclusion. **We're all called to follow the same person, not to look exactly alike.** Appealing directly to the imago Dei in everyone, with a culture-shifting charge to lead interactions with love, Jesus called us friends. Turning Old Testament categories of foreigner, stranger, and enemy on their heads, Jesus shifted the conversation, centering the idea that expansive inclusion in who we love and invite in is not only important, but is the hallmark of Christianity—it's how they will know who we are.
- Inclusion, as opposed to assimilation marked by conforming, allows the imago Dei of each guest-turned-part-of-the-church to be celebrated and honored. Further, this integration of whole selves into the church improves the functioning of the body. The church doesn't need only big toes, it needs members performing the variety of roles they've been gifted to serve and through which they can express their true, God-shaped selves.

Ch. 3 – An Exploration of Current Practices – *How, in practice, does the current assimilation-to-integration pipeline create this gap?*

- **Prescriptive assimilation models are adopted largely because of their easy to replicate programmatic structures.** Despite the widespread adoption of these one-size-fits-all models, **this very element that makes them attractive is the primary problem.** People aren't "one-size." Additionally, because the current models were adopted in good faith and few practitioners have ever experienced them as a newcomer, there is some reluctance to acknowledge the model itself is the problem, instead **preferring to blame the newcomers for the system failures.**

Commented [16]: We have lost a lot of the original intent from the early church. I wonder when it started shifting away from integration into conformity.

Commented [17]: This is key. And also very threatening to established systems of hierarchy.

Commented [18]: I like this idea of integration versus assimilation as it is truly the goal of every believer to be integrate and utilized as an active part of the body, because they have a part and have a part to play.

Commented [19]: Might be worth digging into this one a bit. Seems to me that many of them—except for Matthew and Simon the Zealot—came from Pharisaic families in the Galilee. And Simon the Zealot likely not associated with the fourth philosophy or the second temple period, but rather zealous in a more spiritual sense of those highly dedicated to the Mosaic law. Your point remains, that Jesus' practice of hospitality made room for the Pharisee, the Herodian, and the Gentile, but I might shy away from painting the original 12 as being from wildly diverse backgrounds or worldviews. In terms of "follow me," in the world of first century Judaism, that expression carried with it the invitation to the four-fold practice of rabbinic learning—to memorize the words of the rabbi, to adopt the worldview of the rabbi, to imitate the practices of the rabbi, and to make disciples in the way of the rabbi. So, in some sense, he was saying "become like me." :) Again, I think your point remains that Jesus doesn't call us out of our unique strengths, personalities and cultures, but invites us to experience an even more pronounced version of our unique selves as we abide in him.

Commented [20]: example of the *communitas* as the organizing principle of discipleship over affinity groups.

Commented [21]: Agreed. Despite my push back above, I do embrace the idea that "maturity does not equal conformity" and that growing in Christ-likeness will also result in the growth of our uniqueness.

Commented [22]: Exactly!

Commented [23]: Jesus was not the first rabbi to teach "Love God and Love Neighbor" as the greatest commandment. But he was the first to draw the circle of neighbor wide enough to include "foreigner" and "enemy." Nowhere else do we find the statement "love your enemy" except on the lips of Jesus. I recently discovered some interesting links in Jesus' teaching... [1]

Commented [24]: Consumerization of the Church, members as products

Commented [25]: yes!

Commented [26]: Good point. Sometimes the leaders forget what it's like to be a newcomer. It helps to have someone from the outside with fresh eyes help point out our blind spots.

Commented [27]: Yes! Churches need to take ownership of their responsibilities instead of always shifting blame.

- The misalignment of expected investment widens the gap. Newcomers expect the church to continue its investment in them beyond the programmatic phase, while churches expect a transition where the newcomers become the primary investors both in the church and themselves. This wholesale handoff of responsibility leads to disappointment on both sides. Leadership is disappointed by the ensuing lack of engagement and the newcomer questions whether they ever actually belonged.

Commented [28]: "misalignment of expected investment" - this is the wrestle and the gap the local church is experiencing. In the pre-seeker movement - discipleship was a years long reality. It was a long-term investment into the lives of others. You walked daily/weekly/personally with others - Jesus' example was follow me by watching and repeating. to go back to this is a huge step to right, but it's necessary. First you have to equip the "integrated" believers to start becoming people devoted to the new believers who in turn become MIA's

Ch. 4 – What's in the gap? – *What characteristics mark MIAs?*

- Though the unique needs of new members in the middle stage, those who have completed the welcome processes but are not yet ready to engage independently in church-wide programming, have not been widely explored, the concept of the 'forgotten middle' is not exclusive to the church. Middle America, middle income, middle voters, middle children; found across various sectors, there has been extensive research on this population that will provide applicable lessons to the church about the needs and potential ways to provide for those in the middle.
- Acknowledging these forgotten middle sectors of various populations is the first step but recognizing and providing for their distinctive needs is necessary to truly address the problems created when the middle is overlooked. Though each of the forgotten middle populations that have been studied still exist, efforts made to address them can provide creative springboards to addressing it within the church. Studies of middle childhood have revealed that encouraging involvement in activities increases self-confidence, which has a cyclical effect of encouraging greater agency and involvement in more. When schools began to acknowledge the unique needs of 'B students' and provided tailored instruction and resources, the student's academic performance improved. Beyond this, students need support structures that are integrated into the regular day, tailored to individual students, and deemed essential. Part-time law students desired direct contact with professors and other students. They were also benefited by a realization that though part-time students, as a group, are heterogenous, they still had common needs that were distinctly different than those of full time students. Middle workers were aided by career-pathways specific to them, which aligns with a vision of creating dedicated discipleship pathways for those in the middle of the church. Each of these parallel middle-group experiences provides insight to those in the church.

Commented [29]: I can share some stories of the newcomer program we had at a large church. People joining the church were assigned a long-term member as their "shepherds" to check in with them the first few weeks after they joined. I heard stories from several of the newly joined and how that program wasn't super successful.

Commented [30]: so well put

Commented [31]: I think the research is essential to include, especially regarding church. As a Lead Pastor I'm not yet convinced of these MIA's - statistics and studies really help to show things we can't see.

Commented [32]: great - studies - do you plan to include/link these?

Commented [33]: More obvious markers available? Like, has attended new comers but not made the step to get actively involved.

Commented [34]: Here, connection is noted when someone attaches to a Table Group or a Team. Is this MIA group from a new believers or new person moment to before this connection? Like a person takes our grow class but doesn't plug into table group or team? Still looking for the marks of an MIA to be clearer.

Commented [35]: I might need some more clarity on what the goal is for MIA's. Is there a check-list of characteristics such as: tithers, involved in a small group, involved in service outside the church, serves inside the church?

Commented [36]: I think our vocabulary is a big part of the problem. Is there a different way of thinking from "progression"? I love integration as a reformative paradigm, but I think we need to be careful of not making it, in and of itself, another "process"

Ch. 5 – Align Expectations – What is the consequence of not doing anything about it? Or *Why does this matter to me?*

- Using primarily anecdotal evidence, highlight the misaligned expectations, and the negative fallout that can come from moving directly from assimilation to full-fledged member.
- Despite many churches placing official membership as the "graduation" of assimilation or new member classes, MIAs do not yet know how or if they belong

which then creates misalignment of expectations. This causes frustration by church staff because their effort isn't matched by that of the new member MIAs, and feelings of abandonment by the MIAs when those they've established relationship with in the programmed welcome structure are no longer involved in helping them engage or grow a sense of belonging.

Ch. 6 – Put it Into Practice — *But what can the church do about it?*

- o Since we understand the consequences if we don't pay attention to the gap, how, theoretically and in practice, could the church integrate a structure, program, or culture-shift that *minds* the gap?
- o The biggest impact comes from a posture shift. Adopting the mindset that everyone has a next step, "We're never done growing and we're never done investing," with the growing being primarily the member's responsibility, and the investing the church's. The church can't forget its role. This helps establish mutual investment and commitment.

Ch. 7 – Integration – *Is it worth it?*

- o The primary questions explored will include: What can the church expect if it makes these changes? What can MIAs expect? What unexpected changes should we anticipate from better integrating MIAs?

Ch. 8 – Considerations – *How do we actually do this?*

- o The final chapter will center around a suggested question guide for assessing current structures and implementing MIA-focused efforts. Each question will include the rationale for or benefit of consideration to bolster understanding of the 'why' behind each step of the process.
- o It will also include a brief list of suggested practical ways to implement programs, structure, and culture-shifts that can help churches begin to mind the gap. Since the book focus is questions, however, this will be a limited list intended to inspire creativity more than direct application.

Commented [37]: How is this different from a discipleship program where they are encouraged to develop their faith? Or do they go hand in hand?

Commented [38]: yup

Commented [39]: Yes! 100%!

Commented [40]: Love this

Commented [41]: While I know this is meant to be scalable, I do think smaller churches and bigger churches (along with the forgotten middle :) churches) have unique challenges in this question.

Commented [42]: I'm intrigued!

Commented [43]: Love the practical part!

Feedback Questionnaire

1. Would this study help build a sense of belonging in your church? How?

A - Yes! Especially at {}, where we have such a strong emphasis on self-directed, choose your own path, etc. We are finding that is one of the biggest challenges in our system. So understanding the gaps and why they exist and thinking through the tools that could help not only get people connected initially but keep them connected throughout their entire journey would be really helpful.

B - While, I've not yet seen the data, I do believe it is essential to always have people on a process to a next step. The church can miss this, when just offering a few ways of connecting. I do think that the connection is not just to be put on the church to grow a

person, but the person from new believer to mature christ-follower must be actively involved in engaging their next step and participating in it. In the past the church has become the responsible party almost completely, but there is a balance to that. People participate only as much as they add their own value to any one thing. So, it's important to not just curate a study for the church but also for the individual to participate in. Belonging can be cultivated with all participants activated. Identifying pathways for MIA's will be helpful.

C - I believe this study would be beneficial for my church. There is a pressure felt by staff and laity to refill and resume church as it was before the pandemic. Before the pandemic Sunday morning worship was around 200 and now we are excited when we break 100 on a given week. We currently have a lot of guests each Sunday who return multiple times as well as members who have not plugged back into the life of the church on campus. It would be interesting to learn how the study could help us identify next steps to follow up with those who are newer to the congregation as well as see how to make new connections with those who are not "back" now that church is fully open and reducing COVID protocol.

D - Yes, I think this would be very helpful. We've had quite a few folks that "joined" but never ended up really going from "them" to "us" even though they made some sort of commitment.

E - I would want to know how this is different from a discipleship program...though I think most churches are lacking in either. It's a good thing to be mindful of and if I had been paying more attention to the middle before covid, our church could've possibly avoided losing so many people who disappeared during a season of online worship and never returned. This is definitely needed.

2. Is there a need for a product like this in your church? If so, how would it best be used? If not, why not?

A - Yes, I could see it being used from Early Childhood through Adult Discipleship spaces and First Impressions to think about engagement, building different points of connection and engagement throughout the life span of an {}.

B - I think there is a need for discipleship and connection to go beyond new believers classes. In our church and all churches. Constant awareness of a persons "whereabouts" in their connectivity to Jesus and His church, integrating their gifts within the body and teaching them to be actively a part of their community by way of owning their faith is, I believe, the missing piece. I think this tool could help identify some of those areas that need growth or complete addition to current processes.

C - Yes, many of the previous ways of reaching out to first time guests, repeat guests, and new members no longer fit or make sense in a (hopefully) post-pandemic church. There is a lot of reflection that needs to take place on which elements to resume, revise, or reimagine going forward. We recently had a "Lunch with the Pastors" event where we invited guests in worship and new members from the past 6 months to join us. It was a great time of fellowship, conversation, and welcoming. The next week though I was left

thinking it was a great day but wondering where to go next in order to maintain those connections and the momentum.

D - Maybe not in our church, but in others I have served in, I think definitely. [wife] and I chatted about it and she loved the idea. She is in retention with doctor's offices, and she says it's like that. I agree, I think it's a great idea. In fact, I think I could argue that integration of new people, moving them into members, will work better if this category of people are identified and intentionally spent time with cultivating their interests and ways to keep them involved. Not useful for us as much because we're just struggling to help the "active" people start doing things at this point. Passivity is such a killer.

E - Yes...see answer above. There are always several levels of engagement in churches and most have the typical 10% doing 90% of the work (or is it 20/80?). Anyway, getting the MIA's more involved could help balance those odds and help increase the sense of belonging in some, while keeping the overly active from burning out. This could cause some power struggles for the ones who have always been seen as the most active or "favorites" if suddenly more of the MIA's are getting

3. What are the strengths of the study?

A - Using both Biblical texts and church history to root hospitality. Exploring the characteristics of MIAs. Offering questions over recommendations and principles over prescriptions.

B - Identifying that there is a missing piece

C - I think the open ended element of the application is a strength. I agree that there are lots of "quick fixes" and trendy methods of engaging and welcoming new members. Implementing a prescribed approach may or may not fit a particular setting. By asking questions and having conversations, the study will help congregations, both staff and laity, be able to reflect and consider new ways of engaging "the middle."

D - I think this would be really accessible to lay leaders and ministers alike. So that is a great strength. It also speaks to a, ahem, gap, that exists in the church conversation as a whole. This is a group that seems most likely to be tenuously connected. They do not have social and relational capital often, so they could easily disappear. Honestly it's all very strong. Great ideas, great chapter ideas, simple and easy to reference and follow while also presenting new ideas that should be heard.

E - It addresses the group that is probably not going to speak out for itself. They're not going to complain, but they're also not really growing or engaging, so they could easily slip through the cracks and not be missed. This is very kingdom minded in doing exactly what Jesus did by reaching out to those who others might miss.

4. What would you change?

A - It might be way outside the scope of this study, but I'm curious to know what we can learn from organizations outside the church who have been successful in creating a sense of belonging or a sense of family around their product, brand, or experience.

Thinking of things like Peloton, Apple, etc— how do they keep people engaged and feel “connected” once they have checked a box or already acquired the most recent product. I think we have to be careful lifting principles from capitalistic and democratic structures into our faith communities and Biblical leadership styles, but I do think there might be things to be learned from those who create a genuine sense of family and belonging.

B - I would add more data sets that allow a church to identify where there missing pieces may be. Be very clear about what an MIA's story could look like, using several examples. Be very clear regarding the MIA's part and the churches part for complete success.

C - One thought I had in reading about the middle is how the pandemic affected their connections. Perhaps those who have not returned to church months after church “reopened” were those in the middle before the pandemic. They didn't have the connection established to assist them with returning.

D - I'm not sure what I would change. Here are some things I think you could consider though: but, take with a massive grain of salt as I know you've thought about this about a million hours more than me. And I would also not at all be offended if you say “Na, I like the order I have.” I think you could consider starting with chap 3, then hit 4, then 2, then 1. This kind of slams the problem first thing, but thankfully you have some ways we can work on the problem. In that, recognizing perhaps, that Jesus' practices might be able to inform the problem you've identified, and also the *gap* in our history of hospitality. You could show how in a sense the DNA of integration that Jesus handed then kind of deformed into what we have now, a McDonaldsized process of “assimilation.”

I would guess you've thought of this too, but the current idea of “assimilation” really knee caps the list of gifts that end up being utilized and cuts all the oddballs from having unique contributions. But we would be stronger if they did. I think a section about that could be helpful if you weren't already thinking about it. Or some questions to guide people to thinking about it.

One thing to consider too, are there certain traits or types of people that 1) integrate better themselves, and how can leaders identify them? As in, people that need less hand holding? 2) types that do a great job of “seeing” new people and helping them get integrated. How would we go about helping train those integrative leaders

E - Just more clarity on the difference between this and a discipleship program. What are the signs they are growing in their belonging?

5. How likely are you to recommend this study?

A - I am very likely to recommend it. Particularly if it is well-grounded Biblically and Theologically and provides a framework that can be engaged for all kinds of churches, regardless of size, denomination, or strategy.

B - I'd need to see the finished product and how it contributes to the conversation (I think this is more of an overview currently), but I'd say if churches are finding issues connecting their people, this study could be very helpful!

C - Very likely, I think the questions you posit are very timely given the state of the church right now. One opportunity we have been given in this difficult season is the ability to evaluate and reimagine best practices for ministry. Having a set of questions to guide these conversations would be very helpful.

D- Very. I think this is a fantastic idea, and from what I know you will be meticulous and very intentional in everything you do with it.

[In my experience], there was a wide gulf of perception for people. As I was fairly new to the church, I saw these people as "insiders" or firmly entrenched. But, THEY perceived the situation differently. Even those that had grown up in the church viewed the center of the church or the real belonging members as someone and somewhere else. I wonder if there is also that "gap" in perception, from the way church members perceive themselves vs the way other members perceive them? And what contributes to that? As in, how do we help people move from thinking of themselves as "insiders".

Distinction between assimilation and integration is good, I would be sure to really hammer that point, as I think it's very strong and also important that practitioners of this strategy need to understand it too. You're making a move against the flow of "church business" which is sorely needed, but I would be sure to make it boldly and show the ramifications of the way we're currently viewing this topic.

Also really love the concept of a question book. Think the concept of integration helps a lot with the unique God-given identity of each person, living in a way that complements the rest of their church (but in a totally egalitarian kind of way).

I think you could also tell some really great positive stories about how MIAs moved to integrated parts of the body, give a strong vision like you're talking about of what it could be if we nail this.

E - I'm very intrigued to see more! I can see this being very important for churches.

Page 3: [1] Commented [23]

Laura Holland

4/20/22 4:24:00 PM

Jesus was not the first rabbi to teach "Love God and Love Neighbor" as the greatest commandment. But he was the first to draw the circle of neighbor wide enough to include "foreigner" and "enemy." Nowhere else do we find the statement "love your enemy" except on the lips of Jesus. I recently discovered some interesting links in Jesus' teaching on the Good Samaritan, and how Micah 6:8 makes an appearance in the lawyer's response... but that might be way outside the scope of this project. :)

Known: Building Mutual Connection and Commitment

Introduction

Despite the standard use of guided assimilation processes to integrate new church members, experience and research reveals that these new members feel abandoned when they're moved immediately from guided programming to self-directed engagement. This study is a proposed answer to two questions that flow from this finding: Would providing differently for the unique needs of newcomers increase their sense of belonging and commitment? Assuming the first question is answered in the affirmative, how, then, do we bridge the gap between the assimilation process and full, self-directed engagement in the church?

It is important to note from the beginning that this study is not intended to be a "plug and play," "one-size-fits-all" approach. Your church has a unique mission, vision, and culture that differentiates it from other churches. This study seeks to celebrate and share that distinct character with the belief that by doing so, those who complete the study will better know the church. Because of this, there is prework that must be completed by the church. In part, you must be able to succinctly express your unique mission, vision, and culture which you will hone and capture using the Who Are We? supporting resource. You are the expert on your church, so this approach provides a stage for that expertise to be communicated clearly to the new members. Your church's history, values, and ways the church engages the community will also be explored. You want new members to fully understand the community they're joining. You want your church to be known.

Similarly, everyone who enters the doors of your church brings with them a unique calling, gifts expression, and distinct background that shape who they are and communicate what they add to the existing church community. This study also seeks to celebrate and set the stage for new members to share who they are with the belief that by doing so, those who complete the study will be better known by the church. New members are the true experts on who they are, so this study is not set up for you, the church, to help them better understand themselves, but rather to allow them space to share who they are with you. This requires trust and care, but the return is a new member who feels seen and known for who they are. Because when it comes down to it, we all want to be known.

Commented [1]: I love this...I think a lot about pedagogy-children learn by watching or hearing something modeled, then they're given a chance to practice: with training wheels on, and us running along by them when the wheels come off--or by being allowed to try their funny speech out on us, with us gently correcting them. When it comes to spiritual formation, we tend to lean towards the very academic-things that are churchy can seem very cerebral, leaving a lot of people to feel less confident. For example, I can reflect back on when I visited a Southern Baptist campus ministry as a college student, and felt very unprepared to "share the gospel" with a total stranger-something that was highly encouraged by the group. We have to consider what things we're expecting participants in our local church to be able to do...and if there are holes in their background, giving them some easy on-ramps to build their knowledge/skills/experience. A long time ago, it was popular for non-denom churches to follow a model of "rounding the bases," and I THINK the last base was leadership. There is a difference between leadership and engagement. Not everyone needs to be in leadership in the church, or have the crowning achievement being going out in international mission or pastoral care. The "final base" should more be directed on being known and finding your ways to further grow and serve, knowing how to be active in the church, rather than a passive consumer.

This expression of hospitality, one that creates mutual risk and reward for the church and newcomer alike^[1], reclaims the aims of historical hospitality practices. Defined by turning a stranger into a guest^[2] the understanding and expression of hospitality was expanded by the early Church, with inclusion as a practice separate from, but an element of, hospitality becoming a focus.^[3] The early Church was likely following Jesus' lead, who during his earthly ministry, modeled hospitality that was marked by expansive and inclusive practices.^[4] This was inclusion that sought to integrate, not to conform, as a way to celebrate the unique expression of the *imago Dei*. According to author and theologian Leonard Sweet, "the orthodox understanding of *imago Dei* is less that each individual is created 'in the image of God' and more that all of humanity was made in God's image."^[5] Because of this, the more different types of people we incorporate into our lives and churches, "the greater the glimpse of God."^[6] So not only are we better known in community, but through community we better know God.^[7]

Commented [2]: LOVE THIS line!!

While reclaiming the historical practices, this study also aims to reimagine them for our context today. Retaining the idea that inclusion is meant to integrate, not to conform, allows for a refocusing of our attention. Integration was an important step for Jesus' disciples, because like the new members of your church, they represented a wide variety of backgrounds and personality types.^[8] They were not part of the same group before each chose to follow Jesus, but their shared decision to respond to Jesus' invitation to 'follow me' established a clear picture of hospitality and integration leading to a sense of belonging and commitment. That pattern is one we seek to recreate with this study. By creating a true two-way street of communication between the church and new members, this study sets the stage for the risk/reward liminal space which can be scary for some because of the vulnerability it causes. But this vulnerability is also where belonging is established, and commitment is forged.

Commented [3]: Love this...I visited a short-term study group with one church in town, and all of their small groups had an expectation that at the end, they would compile some suggestions/new learnings/insights to submit to the church leadership. For example, the one I participated in was about the church better welcoming and integrating LGBTQ+ folks. At the end, the group picked three things they'd prioritize for the church to implement or look at, and submitted those in writing.

Integrating the new member into the life of your church, and the life of the church into the new member creates a foundation for the new member to confidently navigate the expectations of self-directed engagement in church programming. It establishes an understanding that the new member isn't done learning, and the church isn't done investing; there is a mutual commitment that can only be met through reinforced belonging. This study aims to establish the basis for long term connection and commitment. The ability to successfully navigate your existing church programming options isn't the ultimate goal, but the freedom and security to engage in spiritual formation and discipleship programs is. But we need to bridge the gap that exists now, allowing new members to flourish, confidently engaging in the discipleship programming in your church, deepening their relationship with Christ. This study seeks to help you build that bridge.

Commented [4]: A good analogy for this (if you dive into this any deeper) is the Fenced-in Playground Experiment. On playgrounds without fences, the children tended to gather around the teacher, and were reluctant to stray far from her view. On playgrounds that were fenced in, however, they ran all around the entire playground, feeling more free to explore. The researchers concluded that with a boundary, in this case a fence, children felt more at ease to explore the space. By sharing the boundaries of your church landscape, we in fact empower people to possess more freedom as they navigate your church discipleship programming.

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Session 1: Welcome, *Known* Vision Casting, and Information Trade: Session 1

focuses on introducing the facilitator and connector(s) to participants, introducing participants to each other, and introducing *Known*. People want to know that they're meeting for a purpose, with a purpose, so this session helps establish both. In groups, if you don't take time at the beginning of a group to get to know each other, it can be difficult to backtrack and establish connections later. This night is informational and relational. Trust that there is value in this alone. This is also the session where logistics are taken care of: explain the Participant Workbook (hand out or give access to, depending on format), officially create the breakout groups if you have enough participants to warrant this, and facilitate an information trade: have participants trade phone numbers with at least one other participant and a Connector. Consider using the *You're Known* Conversation Cards to begin building rapport. *Weekly Challenge*: Call or meet up with a fellow participant or Connector during the week.

(Benefit: Building comfort and trust is necessary to create a safe space where participants feel comfortable being known. Focusing initially on relationship building will create a strong foundation for the remaining sessions.)

Commented [5]: Maybe important to add an exchange on expectations between facilitators and participants. It helps build commitment/buy-in for the process earlier on. It also allows participants to feel ownership over the process and community.

Session 2: Church history and vision: Taking a cue from the lyrics of Cotton-Eye Joe, this session is focused on sharing "where did you come from; where [will] you go."

Sharing the church's history establishes an understanding of the who, why, and how of the church. It provides a foundational understanding of background and highlights areas of growth and change. It's not enough to share where you've been, though. New members also want to know where the church is going—what is the vision for the future. This can take many shapes: sharing the guiding questions the executive team considers each time a decision for the future is made, short-to-mid-term plans that are more concrete, the Lead Pastor's wildly big guiding vision that the rest of the team has rallied behind, a dream for the impact you hope to make in the city. This isn't meant to tie you to these plans but gives participants the opportunity to consider whether they can get behind your vision, too. *Weekly Challenge*: Consider how you responded to hearing the church's vision. Record your response (mental, emotional, spiritual).

Commented [6]: Maybe something here about connecting the church's vision to the larger Kingdom vision as well. I would encourage facilitators here to lead with vulnerability by sharing their history with the church community. This is when the facilitators and church leaders assume the risk by putting themselves out there (history & vision) while inviting participants to do the same in the following week.

Commented [7]: Because of recent trends, we used A Church Called Tov and What is the Church, and Why Does it Exist? in the last DG class we did—maybe add talking about the history/vision of the big-C Church and pitfalls we want to avoid? (consumerist practices, mega-church leader, etc.)

(Benefit: Sharing history provides backstory, but sharing vision requires bold vulnerability. *Known* is built on both participants and the church sharing a risk/reward relationship, and this sharing helps establish that.)

Session 3: Participant history and vision: We want to know each participants history and vision, too. Using prompts from the **Who Am I?** process, participants will share pivotal moments in their lives that help explain who they are. Next, we'll turn to who they are becoming. What goals, dreams, or aspirations do they hold? What are they working toward now? How do these align with the church's vision? *Weekly Challenge:* Do you think your vision and the church's vision align? Why or why not? Does this even matter? Why or why not? Record your responses.

(Benefit: Our personal history has made us who we are and sharing pivotal moments with others gives them a peek into *why* we are that way, too. Hearing participant visions provides a glimpse into who they are becoming, giving the church insight into the unique needs and gifts of the new members. This session helps build context and empathy and builds on the developing rapport.)

Session 4: Church mission: The fourth session explores the Church's mission which covers a lot of ground. What do you believe and how is that expressed? What does your presence in the community look like? What does discipleship look like for kids? Adults? How is the church leaving a mark? This session builds on your history and vision by sharing what you're doing now. If there are opportunities for new members to engage in anything you're sharing, make both the offer and information about where they go for next steps explicit. *Weekly Challenge:* Join the mission! Find out how to be a part of at least one of the opportunities shared.

(Benefit: This session allows the church to explain why you do what you do and how it all fits together. New members can likely find information online, so this session is more about sharing the heart behind what the church is doing. By sharing the reasoning behind the mission, new members will also have a greater understanding of why they are doing what they're doing once they fully engage with the church.)

Commented [8]: One thing we've started expressing as we welcome new people to [] is that they bring new things to us; that we will change because of their callings and giftings. Therefore, we leave space for outreach/service opportunities and freedom to change the way we do things in worship, fellowship, etc.

Commented [9]: I don't know if this would be fleshed out with different options in a participant's/leaders' workbook, but maybe give accommodations for people new to the faith, or first-time explorers, and further options for people who don't have a strong academic background. I'm thinking of a couple of people who've participated in our Discovering [] class who had high social anxiety, and some who had learning disabilities (dyslexia) and/or backgrounds that didn't involve complex discussions-

Commented [10]: I probably would suggest avoiding church alignment conversations until Week 5. This way the church leadership and facilitators are modeling getting to know participants with no agenda except to know them. Instead, I would give greater focus on how each other's paths connect and relate to another-guiding facilitators and participants to actively look for connections in our collective stories and celebrate unique aspects of our individual stories. This is when we take a step back to witness the fullness of the imago Dei found within community (Leonard Sweet).

Commented [11]: Love this and also the push at this point to experience the church's mission together. Providing an opportunity to see the church's mission in action would be key here. Also providing an experience outside of the normal group time will be key as well in order to disturb the current rhythm. Breaking the rhythm will be a subtle way of sharing how most of the discipleship programming post-Known-like experiences will be self-directed experiences.

Session 5: Participant mission: Session 5 dives into what drives the new member. It reveals areas of passion or interest, explains where they're already engaged in the community, and how they, personally, live out Jesus' mission in their life. Asking, "where do you bring Jesus," also helps seed the conversation that our faith isn't contained in a 2-hour timeslot on Sunday but lived and expressed every day in everything we do. This session helps provide a fuller picture of who the participants are and the experiences and passions they're bringing with them to the church. *Weekly Challenge:* How does the idea that you bring Jesus with you wherever you go make you feel? Does it change anything? Does it make you want to change anything? Record your answers.

(Benefit: New members join the church with fully formed lives, interests, and activities. Not only is it important and helpful to know what new members are bringing to the church, but it also provides the groundwork for future discipleship opportunities, brings to light shared interests or passion areas with those already in the church, and seeds the idea that they're bringing all of themselves to church—they don't need to be perfect or just like everyone else to have a place in your church.)

Session 6: Culture Code: This is the final session focused on your church and what makes it unique. Does your church slow-clap to show appreciation? Does your church have a blog, internal messaging board, or app that it would benefit participants to know about or join? Does everyone know to email Susan about joining a small group since they're not listed on the website? This is where you consider those things that church established members seem to just *know*, or intuit, but new members have no reason to assume or catch onto without help. This is the session to make new members insiders. *Weekly Challenge:* Join the culture-specific crowd! Perfect your slow-clap, read the blog, sign up for the app, participate in whatever was shared.

(Benefit: Few things make someone feel like more of an outsider than missing the inside joke, not knowing the procedure, or feeling as though they've missed something obvious. Sharing those things about your church takes the mystery out of what being part of the community really looks like, helps ensure that the unofficial rules of the church are conveyed, and displays trust to the participants. By placing this in session 6, participants are more likely to have seen or experienced scenarios you discuss and have questions of their own based on personal experiences.)

Commented [12]: This is when facilitators become even more intentional about making connections within the church community beyond Known. It will reinforce the shared connections with the wider church community.

Commented [13]: I really like attention to this—I think it would help the group to encourage each other post-conversation, asking follow up questions in later weeks about things that are shared

Commented [14]: I like having the explicit conversations towards the end. Encourage implementors and facilitators to intentionally bring in some of the unique culture pieces into the experiences rituals & routines. This way they already feel "IN" before having this conversation.

Commented [15]: When we had a building, we used to do a tour on the last session, showing people where the trash bags were, where to take them when they were full, etc.

Commented [16]: I've been making a case for transparency in budget at this point in a welcome class—let people see where the funds go and what is prioritized. Let them in on what you'd want to do if you had more money in the budget.

Session 7: Where Do You Fit?: Knowing what you do now about the history, vision, mission, and culture of the church, where do you fit in? How do you want to leave your mark on this community? Spiritual gift assessments can be helpful, but they can also make us question what we know about ourselves and whether or not our unique traits can benefit the church. You already know your strengths, interests, and passion areas. If they align with an existing ministry or discipleship program, great! If they don't, great! How can you become more engaged using your strengths for the church? Do you need to start a program? Does your interest area meet a need or gap the church currently has? *Weekly Challenge:* Find out more about your specific areas of interest. You can contact the staff member or ministry lead, look on the website, or ask someone currently serving or engaged in that program how they got involved and what they get out of being a part of it.

Commented [17]: Some participants may already be engaging in some ministry areas due to eagerness and interest. I would encourage facilitators to use this space for debrief their experiences with the teams and what they're seeing. The excitement of engaging is something new is sometimes the most attractive and inviting. Plus, people who are more introverted will see they may have a buddy if they join a mission, group, or team.

(Benefit: This session allows participants to share more about themselves and begins to lay the groundwork for their transition into self-guided engagement. Specifically, this session allows Connectors and Facilitators to fill in information gaps about what the church does and doesn't provide, discuss specific, personalized interests and engagement desires, and it provides an informal opportunity for church leadership to gauge (1) what new members are looking for and (2) the unique talents, interests, and skills that are now a part of your church.)

Session 8: Integration Activation: The final session of *Known* is better understood as the official launch into the next season of the new members' engagement in the life of the church. Using conversational prompts designed to reinforce the previous sessions, the participants and Connectors will work together to make personalized plans for the participants' next steps. This should include discussion specifically about the interest area discussed during Session 7. Connectors, who will remain in their role beyond the duration of *Known*, will also use this time to establish their next relational touch point with each participant. The session ends by celebrating the unique traits and gifts represented in the group, reminding participants that through this process they are known. *Weekly Challenge:* Commit to your next step.

(Benefit: Providing a personalized "Connector" to participants provides social continuity once *Known* is completed, aids the gradual confidence building needed for participants to step fully into self-guided engagement, and offers past participants an easy way to ask questions that come up after the group is completed, thereby bridging the relational, engagement, and information needs that continue beyond *Known*.)

Supporting Resources

Implementation Guide – This guide answers all the nuts-and-bolts questions about how, technically, *Known* can be started in your church. This includes a description of each leadership role, creative prompts for advertising, an overview of each session, and guided exercises designed to help in completing the **Who Are We?** process. The **Implementation Guide** also includes a scaling resource, outlining the various program options considering church size, frequency of new members, availability of people to serve as facilitator and connectors, and other scenarios representing unique church needs.

Facilitator Guide – The Facilitator will be the “face of the program” at your church. They will be the primary point person at each session, lead the teaching/program portion, will oversee the Connectors, and ensure smooth running of *Known*. This guide provides best practices, creative prompts to personalize sessions, and a **Session Guide**. Where the Implementation Guide explains how to launch the program, the Facilitator Guide will explain how to launch the week-to-week programming.

Connector Guide – Connectors are the personal bridges of the program. Connectors will serve as mentors during the *Known* sessions, developing relationships and facilitating connections with participants. Uniquely, Connectors will remain in their role for a minimum of 6 months after the completion of the *Known* sessions, serving as a guide helping to encourage engagement and continued involvement to past participants. The Connector Guide includes a **Session Guide**, creative prompts for community-building activities, and best practices for the on-going Connector role.

Participant Workbook – An online based “workbook” that includes the **Session Guide**, **Who Am I?** instructions, and a section for notetaking each week.

Session Guide – The week-to-week teaching and learning guide made up of both universal teaching on each topic and integration of church-specific information as uncovered in **Who Are We?** and creative prompts that align with the participant **Who Am I?** process. All participants, connectors, and facilitator will work from a standard **Session Guide**.

Who Are We? – A guided online process to help churches learn how to best share their unique story. Answers to questions about your church's mission, vision, and culture will be integrated into your church-specific Known curriculum.

Who Am I? – A guided online process to help new members learn how to best share their unique story. The answers to their questions about their calling, gifts, and background will be shared as part of Sessions 3, 5, and 7.

You're Known Conversation Cards – A pack of cards with conversation prompts that can be used as ice breakers, during connection events, or provided to participants to use in their personal get togethers. The cards are designed to aid conversation beyond the typical getting-to-know-you stage and allow participants the opportunity to truly be known.

Feedback Questionnaire

1. Would this study help build a sense of belonging in your church? How?
 - A - I think that a study like this would be a huge gift to many churches. There are so many different models for an assimilation pathway but they all tend to be built on implementing the best practices of another church (i.e., Saddleback, Church of the Highlands, Northpoint). What I have seen in so many different churches is that their assimilation piece fits the overall plan of how their church operates and thus in order for their assimilation plan to work for your church you need to fully implement their entire church model... but few churches do that and so the assimilation piece feels a bit hollow.
 - B - I certainly think so, it starts with relationship which, like you said, many of these programs miss from the beginning.
 - C - Yes! I like that it addresses the informational/structural points of interest regarding the church, but then addresses the active participation of the newcomer. I reflect a lot on my own spiritual formation in the UMC, and I have constant appreciation for the associate pastor who was in charge of our confirmation program. We learned our denominational history, but then we also learned about service by actually going and serving with a group in outreach; we learned about the leadership structure of the Admin Council and Council on Ministries, and then were asked to attend one of those meetings, where we were warmly welcomed. I can clearly remember in this experience and in others when I was an adult in the UMC when teen reps were asked for their opinions and feedback. We probably should all consider how to extend this practice in valuing people of all ages and stages in our church, and giving them opportunities to see faith in action and start building their serving/self-feeding muscles.
 - D - Absolutely yes! This framework will help churches build discipleship programs that focus on integrating new parishioners into the community first. For churches with a strong discipleship culture, integration into the community is the biggest lift. From there new

parishioners will be empowered to navigate the community with intentionality and with the appropriate relational tools.

E - I'm not currently pastoring and attend a church in another state on Zoom.

2. Is there a need for a product like this in your church? If so, how would it best be used? If not, why not?

A - There is a need for something like this in our church. For our church I think it would be ideal to use something like this in a small group but on campus context. We are finding that getting people from church services to an in home small group is a big step for people and so we hope to have something in place to help bridge that gap. I think this is something that could do that well.

B - Yes, in our church, we do not have anything yet because we are just starting. This would actually be a perfect fit for France. It seems that it can be contextualized but also brings out the French relational culture throughout.

C - Yes! Because of the changes in our church, we have redesigned our [church welcome] class several times.

D - We have some existing spaces that exist within our church; however, a product like this will allow us to strategically create new programs that are contextualized to our various locations and special demographics.

E - See above

3. What are the strengths of the study?

A - It feels like a good comprehensive overview that leads people towards engagement. Leaning into sharing stories and helping people feel known is critical. Too often churches make this kind of process about themselves, and this stays away from that.

B - I like that it is about the individual, not just about the church.

C - I like the emphasis on the relational need...for people to make connections early on, and then to have a connector to see them through to the next level of participation in the local church.

D - The modality and flexibility of this study. This offers a framework that will allow provide a strong community-centric foundation. Also, this allows space for churches to be creative and contextualize the process for their unique church culture.

E **Benefits I see. (I'm sure I might think of more)**

... **Love the description of "self-directed discovery"**. It's a tool you are giving to participants ("... teach a man to fish...").

... **It will help build true community** vs. being united just because we all attend the same church.

... **"Known" eliminates the red tape and unofficial "quarantine period"** when some churches hold people through before joining, leading and or starting a ministry... "Well,

we have to get to know them first !” By the time the eight weeks is over, a person will “know and be known.”

... It doesn't require the same kind of investment by individual church ministries like customer management software does.

Our staff and Volunteers often resisted even using these systems.

1. They often don't know how to make room and onboard someone into their ministry.
2. They don't see the value in it
3. They see it as one more task added on to their already overwhelming schedules. E.g., “Now I have to take hours of my time every week making phone calls and tracking the “if this / then this” pathways to assimilation to keep people from falling through the cracks.

It would supply these leaders with:

1. People serving and supporting because they found this ministry through a process of guided process of self-discovery.
2. People ready to take on responsibility and relieve the burden already on someone who volunteers and feels frustrated and overloaded.

... “Known” is counter-cultural in a good way.

1. We were taught as Pastors to close the “back door”. People may “discover” the church is not really a good fit for them allow them comfortable and more natural way to continue searching for a community that does... instead of quietly sneaking out the back. It may be these may never gel and leave in frustration, anger or even conflict.
2. Because the church knows these people better, they could even bless them out the back door and suggest churches where they could prosper (e.g., a more liturgical congregation, or a they may have been aided to discover they are looking for a church that serves the homeless). I've done it. They appreciate it and it sometimes surprised them in Good way.
3. Church may be less motivated to manipulate people — whom we don't know — into staying and serving or connecting in a church they don't know... only for them to find too late that it's not a good fit and now they're trapped with no easy way out.

... It would help Pastors clearly define and articulate their vision, mission, values and culture

I like the way you provide help to leaders for this. “*What's the dna of your church*”? It all started for most of us in the 80's. The whole “have a vision for your church” thing. The first time I heard it at a Pastors' Conference, I honestly thought they were talking about... you know... a “vision”.

At first I was intimidated when asked about our vision, “Pastor, what's your vision for our church?” Did they mean, “*Hey, it's January. What's the new thing the Lord is saying to do THIS calendar year?*” Or did they mean, “*Why is our church in this*

community?" It was in me, but I had to be taught and guided through the process to be able to articulate clearly. We can see that the online training could help that to happen.

Old Pastor { } at Philadelphia Church in Ballard would say, *"My vision for the church is to find the will of God and do it."* Hmmmm.... Silly Pentecostals!

-
Another reason I like it... It's not something your church "does" or "uses", it would become "this is just the way our church is".

Like salt (Known) on steak (local church). If not enough salt, you know it could be better, but might just think it's bland meat. Too much salt and you overpower the flavor of otherwise good meat. Just the right amount of salt and good meat tastes great! ...and you become known as a great Steakhouse.

4. What would you change?

A - As I look at the order I wonder if there is a way to make it a little more "organic" and less cut and dried... like could people sharing their stories happen earlier in the process so that people start to feel connected to each other sooner in the process. Church history is important to share, but being so early in the process it feels like it jumps from getting to know each other into talking about ourselves. I like to think of this like a "first date" and imagine how off putting it is on a date when someone only talks about themselves.

The key question I would have in mind for each week is the question most people are asking... "What's in it for me..."

Take a look at Donald Miller's stuff on StoryBrand Marketing... the big takeaway is that the customer (church members) are the hero of their own story and they need the church to be their guide. Don uses the Star Wars analogy... the person at your church is Luke Skywalker on their own hero journey. They need the church to be Yoda (or Obi Wan depending...). We are not on a mutual hero journey, but rather we come alongside the hero of the story and give them a plan for how they can accomplish their journey... so how will being part of this church make their life better (without all of the ick of prosperity gospel...) because we believe that Jesus will make your life better and that being in community will transform your life.

B - I may start with participant history and vision for session two to focus on why they are here in this world and then move into the church after that for session three.

C - I would make sure to add accommodations for any special-need individual situations you can think of: second language learners, new to the faith, exploring the faith for the first time, those who struggle with anxiety, people experiencing learning differences, (think about color blindness in making visuals, using a dyslexia-friendly font, etc.)

Is there a week to address suggested tools and resources for people to study scripture? For example, what translation would you suggest to someone who is new to or exploring

the Christian faith? What is a concordance, or other resource tools that a teacher might speak of? How do you vet commentaries and podcasts?

D - See above in my comments surrounding the sessions.

E - **Things to consider because we know what Pastors do.**

... **I can see they need to trust the material and the process**

... **Commit ahead of time not to co-opt, hijack or alter the materials and methods.**

I know pastors. A pastor may decide it's too long and cut it down to 6 weeks by combining a couple sessions — or just eliminating a week or two all together. I've often seen them change or assimilate something into an existing program. Then, if it fails, "We tried that and it didn't work."

... **The lead pastor/leading elder/elders team have personal buy-in...** (i.e, whoever articulates the vision, mission and strategy of the church). I've had my legs cut out from under me when the senior pastor wanted to bail when it got tough because *"It was never really my thing. You seemed pretty enthused about it, but I'm not interested in investing time/money. You ought to be able to figure out a creative way to pay for it."*

... **Can they commit** to this because it's the right thing to do? This is a right way to treat the sheep that God's sends to us.

... **Do they understand** that this is not another "church growth/discipleship" system?

... **Does the church realize** the time and energy it's going to take to get this off the ground?

... **Can they see** it's a long-term commitment without a tangible or measurable ROI in the near or even mid-term process?

5. How likely are you to recommend this study?

A - VERY!! Hurry up and write it!

B - 10/10, I love it and I am already wondering how I can get this translated! I am really looking forward to this finished product!

C - Of course I'd recommend it!

D - Highly recommend to churches looking to build out their discipleship programming.

E - VERY!

Options later on down the road. Could the church opt for:

... **A Trainer to come and personally train leadership**, facilitators and connectors; answer questions; and maybe even help them launch?

... **A Personal Coach** to zoom with stakeholders on a monthly basis? This is something offered to me as a Real Estate professional. My Broker had a business coach she met with weekly or bi-weekly

... **Possible Benefits to Current Members**

Current church members may have missed parts of this healthy assimilation and could be benefited by the tools for self-discovery that new members are being given. Maybe they've been guilted into serving in the nursery ministry when they really have a passion for something else.

It might be they have never thought to consider why their church is in the community or where the leaders see the church going... or the vision and mission of the church are incongruous — or never defined at all. Up to this time been functioning under generic slogans like, “To Know Christ and Make Him Known” or “To Be a Light to Our Community”, etc.

[1] Jerusha Matsen Neal, *The Overshadowed Preacher: Mary, The Spirit, and the Labor of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 146.

[2] Lee Roy Martin, “Old Testament Foundations for Christian Hospitality,” *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 35, no. 1 (2014), 4. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v35il.752>.

[3] Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (London, UK: SPCK, 2008), 42.

[4] A few examples of this include the call to show hospitality to enemies (Romans 12:20) and those who cannot repay the kindness (Luke 14:12-14).

[5] Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 222.

[6] Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 222.

[7] Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2016), 142.

[8] Leonard Sweet, *The Bad Habits of Jesus: Showing Us the Way to Live Right in a World Gone Wrong* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016). 103.

Appendix E—Project Appendix Documentation

Known Trainings

Known trainings all exist as both written transcripts and video recordings. The trainings are focused on *Known* vision casting, aiding implementation efforts, and team training. I intend to continue creating video trainings based on feedback I receive from users as part of my continued development plan.

To support my “quality” benchmark of having an accessible and user-friendly website, all videos have the option of being viewed with captions and most are placed on the website with the link to the corresponding transcript listed in tandem.

Eight branded *Known* video trainings and corresponding transcripts are included below.



FIGURE 35: WHAT IS KNOWN? TRAINING VIDEO
[HTTPS://VIMEO.COM/791545844/C50DFF0259](https://vimeo.com/791545844/c50dff0259)

Known Training

What is Known?

“To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.” -

Timothy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*

People want to know more than your church's service times and ministry offerings, and they want to *be* known for more than how they can best serve. *Known* provides a suite of resources designed to help you tell the story of your church—your vision, mission, values, and beliefs—while getting to truly know those who are seeking to call your church home.

Rooted in story, *Known* uses questions, conversation prompts, and storytelling techniques to aid churches and new members in their processes of knowing each other and being known.

You know that churches aren't one-size and neither are their members; Why use a prescriptive approach to introduce new members to your church? So many welcome, assimilation, or community integration programs in churches use a formulaic approach to share the high points of the community people are joining without fully sharing their history, mission, values, and vision (where they've been, where they are now, where they hope to go and how they plan to do so). Likewise, many new members complete these programs knowing little beyond logistical details about their new church and still feel unknown themselves. This leaves new members feeling untethered and struggling to know where and how to invest and commit, and it leaves the church's investment in new member programming without the expected, resulting commitment to show for it.

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Known breaks away from the typical script and instead provides the foundation for a story-based, question-driven, relationship-building experience that allows the sharing of the unique story of your church and those of your church members to guide the process. Your context and your community are central to what is shared, and the context and story of your new members is what you'll learn.

Using a question-based foundation for preparing your church's *Known* experience, each expression becomes tailor-made to best represent your community and your context. Moving beyond the consumer mindset so many church leaders are desperately trying to get their members out of, *Known* creates a baseline of mutual commitment and investment rooted in story. When we *feel* known we care more. When we *know* more, we care more. *Known* combines these truths to create a custom welcome experience for your church to not just welcome and integrate new members, but allows you to truly know who is joining your church and to feel confident that they, too, know you.



FIGURE 36: *HOW DID WE GET HERE?* TRAINING VIDEO

[HTTPS://VIMEO.COM/791541800/07B7AF812D](https://vimeo.com/791541800/07b7af812d)

Known Training

Known: How Did We Get Here?

After years of working with churches of all sizes to establish or revamp discipleship efforts primarily through small groups, I started to notice a trend. And then my family relocated, forcing us to find a new church home after being deeply embedded in our church community for over a decade, and I *personally* experienced the trend. Broadly speaking, churches are great at welcoming visitors and churches have worked hard to develop their discipleship pipeline, but **between these two stages where most churches focus and excel there is an experiential gap for new members**. It is in this liminal period that many new members get lost in the fray and, because they do not feel a connection to the community or ministries of their new church, they leave and try again at a church down the street; or, they stay without making real relational investments or missional commitments. This stage is also the onset of many church leadership concerns and headaches. It is where we begin to see the impacts of consumer culture, where welcome efforts need to be ramped up because closing the back door just isn't cutting it anymore, and where frustration can overwhelm, making it tempting to assume that the lack of commitment is simply a reflection of society these days. There has to be another way.

Experiencing this trend from both sides—both as a new member and a church leader—I started asking questions. The first, and guiding one, being: How do we, as church leaders, overcome the impacts of this liminal season for new members to help them feel connected, invested in, and committed? This led to asking a series of follow-up questions: Why is this happening? What needs to change? How do we need to change? What could it look like? And finally, what difference would these changes actually make? After years of research and conversations with church staff, lay leaders, new members, and people who desperately want to be part of a church community but cannot figure out how, I noticed that **underneath the emotions of each experience was a shared desire: we want to be known**.

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

As church leaders, you want new members to know about the mission, vision, values, and culture of your church so that they can commit to and invest in what you're already doing and where you hope to go. New members want you to know who they are, what they bring with them to your church—their talents, their desires, their experience—and to see that you can commit to and invest in who they are and who they hope to be. Our current way of doing things leaves those on both sides feeling unknown and unwanted. We can do better.

This is where *Known* comes in. *Known* is a story-based, question-driven experience designed to build committed, invested relationships between new members and your church. Using a framework that creates a custom curriculum, your church's story will be embedded in each session ensuring that new members complete the experience not just knowing where they can serve, but why your church values the service and how it fits into the larger vision and mission of the church. *Connectors*, current church members who have a knack for making sure people feel seen and heard and who know how to become engaged in your church, are *Known*'s unique answer to bridging the gap for new members between guided welcome programming to self-directed engagement. *Connectors* also ensure that new members are introduced to your community and culture as they learn how they can become part of it. Because mutual investment is important, each session will also include opportunities for new members to share their stories so that at the end of the experience you know more about them than which ministry or group they plan to join; you know who they are.

Your church will answer a series of questions using [Tell Your Story: Session Script Builder](#) designed to help you best communicate who you are, what makes your church culture and community unique, and how to become both part of your mission now and part of your vision for the future. The answers to these questions will become the foundation for a tailored welcome experience for new members. New members will be given a chance to answer questions, too, so they are able to share their interests, where they're currently involved in the community, how they hope to grow, and who they hope to become, ensuring that they complete the experience also having had the opportunity to share who they are with their new church community. Led by *Connectors* who will continue in their facilitation role beyond the official *Known* experience, new members will become integrated into your community through story—their story and your story as you seek to act, together, in God's story.

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building



FIGURE 37: *WHY STORYTELLING?* TRAINING VIDEO
[HTTPS://VIMEO.COM/791537716/75696FC7FB](https://vimeo.com/791537716/75696fc7fb)

Known Training

Why Storytelling?: How Changing the Metaphor Will Lead to More Engagement in Your Church

We need a new metaphor to help guide our church connection and integration strategies. Assimilation, one-size-and-timeline-fits-all approaches, business-influenced church growth movements; these all fail to represent what it means to enter into a new church family, and the resulting programs fail to effectively move a new member into an invested, committed member of your church with many new members instead dropping off after a welcome class or assimilation program, causing frustration for church staff who have dedicated time and energy to the newcomers, and alerting us to the disappointment new members experience with the current methods. So what if the problem isn't the lack of faithfulness of potential new members, but that we've allowed the wrong metaphor to overguide us, the church.

Known is built around the power of story—the church's story, members' story, and how we're all a part of Jesus' story. The metaphor of story doesn't presuppose specific plot points or timelines, and it recognizes that new members, both those new to church and new to *your* church, already have a story worth telling and a story worth hearing—a story you want to know and be a part of.

Known also assumes that new members want to know more than your church's service times and ministry opportunities, that they want to know the church's story and the stories of those who are already a part of the community they're seeking to join.

But why is story a better metaphor? And why does it work? Most welcome classes and new member programs are based on the small talk equivalent of what the church is about and then are confused when new members aren't completely ready to accept our marriage proposal. Because just like any other relationship, small talk can only get you so far in getting others to commit to your vision and invest in your mission; this is especially true if they have no clue what your vision and mission are. Storytelling is a means to move beyond small talk, data points, and information that is frankly meaningless to most people when they're originally told. We've probably all heard Teddy Roosevelt's quote, "people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Here, we recognize the throughline between information sharing and relationship building: people don't care to

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Focused

know until they understand why they should care. So tell them why they should care. And do this by starting with why YOU care, and what you care about.

Combining the power of storytelling with asking, and listening to, questions, *Known* leans into the method Jesus modeled. It is estimated that Jesus asked over 300 recorded questions during his Earthly ministry and typically responded to questions posed to him with a story—over 30 are included in the Gospel accounts— instead of providing direct answers. We know, however, that the story *was* the answer. Embedded in story is truth that can otherwise be difficult to unearth, and questions encourage self-reflection and consideration of the past, allowing a more truthful story to emerge.^[1]

Stories connect us and build trust^[1] and questions have a transformative quality that not only establish connections that are deeper than those formed by other conversational practices, but also have the potential to elicit change.^[2] We're always telling stories^[3] in part because they help us learn to make sense of the world^[4] and our place in it. Stories lead to better connection with others and ourselves, as they allow us to share where we've been, who we are now, and where we hope to go in the future. Our history, mission, vision, values, and culture all come together to help provide a full picture of who we are.

Stories also require vulnerability, which is something missing from our current assimilation strategies where we ask new members to be vulnerable, but do so from a place of security. Mutual investment in vulnerability lays the foundation for mutual investment within the full life of the church.

In the context of *Known*, stories highlight what makes each church, and everyone in it, unique. Emily Dickinson's poem, "Tell all the truth but tell it slant," encourages a slow, circuitous route to telling the whole truth so as not to overwhelm the listener. *Known* follows Dickinson's advice: though more piecemeal than circuitous, *Known* goes step by step to help develop your stories about who you are, what you're doing, and where you hope to go, and helps new members do the same.



FIGURE 38: CULTURE TRAINING VIDEO

[HTTPS://VIMEO.COM/791545583/2690533E86](https://vimeo.com/791545583/2690533e86)

Known Training

Culture

American novelist, David Foster Wallace, once wrote, “There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says ‘Morning, boys. How’s the water?’ And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes ‘What is water?’”

Much like those young fish, determining a church’s culture can be difficult to do from the inside. It’s especially difficult when you’re the one making decisions, counseling church members, approving budgets, and in general have a backstage pass to the inner workings of the church as the community of people and the organization. When we’re constantly surrounded by it, we can forget the uniqueness of our situation; we can find ourselves being asked about the water and realize we have no clue because we’re so immersed.

Culture is a representation of who we are in our context. Cultural expressions include customs, laws, dress, social standards, codes of conduct, and traditions. In short, culture is a reflection of the community that makes it up and it informs the community within it. Because people grow and change, so does culture, but the community is the engine for the change.

There are elements that make every church unique, as it should be so we’re best able to serve and reflect the context and community we’re a part of. Culture is a recognition and celebration of those things, but it is also a melting pot of how we interact within our community.

There are a few questions every church can ask to begin the process of self reflection and understanding culture. There are no wrong answers—your culture simply *is*—but the answers can reveal elements of your culture of which you’re proud and elements you’d like to address. As much as possible, try to remain neutral as you

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reflect, but take note of the areas where you find yourself wanting to defend or explain. That can be a good indicator that there are cultural elements that deserve a closer look.



Who do we trust and how is trust expressed or demonstrated?

How do we respond to feedback or questions? How does the answer change based on who it is asking or suggesting?

How people are celebrated and honored, and, maybe more to the point, *who* is celebrated is honored.

What are most church-wide communications discussing?



FIGURE 39: *PRACTICING THE ONE ANOTHERS IN COMMUNITY* TRAINING VIDEO [HTTPS://VIMEO.COM/791546122/E51C22ED4E](https://vimeo.com/791546122/e51c22ed4e)

Known Training

Practicing the One Anothers in Community

Love one another. Be devoted to one another. Honor one another. Live in harmony with one another. Confess to one another. Pray for one another. Be patient with, build up, serve, forgive, and look to the interests of one another. Almost 50 times in the New Testament, a one another command is given. These commands are unique because for us to follow them we must be in community *with others*.

God exists in community; we do too. These commands are designed to help us live well in community and help guide us in how to support and encourage each other and model what community can be. They're also a reminder that at times, living in community is hard. We probably wouldn't need so many encouragements about how to live with others if it was a simple ask, right? But people are messy. And not just *those* people, we are messy. As pastor Heather Zempel writes, community is messy, and "messes in groups [of people] aren't the exception; they're the rule." So beyond being commanded to love one another, what makes it worth the effort?

Think of a time where you felt like you had managed to honor the commitment to live in harmony with others. What was special about that group or community? What effort or dynamic made that peace and harmony possible? Now imagine that same group and picture someone new coming in. What happens then? Especially if this scenario isn't simply hypothetical for you, really think about the impact of the new person or people on your current group dynamics. Did you welcome them in with open arms and shift the group dynamics to allow them to fully become part of the group? If so, that really was a pretty incredible community, because often instead of responding that way we either resist newcomers altogether, or, most often, expect them to slide into the existing group without shaking it up in any way. We want them to be a part of what we have and who we are, but to not change the awesome dynamic.

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We do this a lot in churches, too. Even if we don't think we've been able to fully live out the one anothers of scripture, we know the effort we've put in to get where we are and we can be hesitant for anyone to rock the boat. We welcome them...with some conditions. Sometimes these conditions are spoken, other times they're expressed non-verbally. Either way, the message is heard loud and clear: We want you, but only if...you change this first. We want you...conditionally. We want you...but not fully.

This isn't a question of whether or not there are discipleship expectations on members or hopes of life change for new members once they invest and commit. A goal of the one anothers of scripture is just that—that we deepen our commitment to each other and Jesus through these practices. But if one anothers are intended to occur in community, we must first build community. It might help to reframe “one another” to “bringing together one and other.” Instead of the *Field of Dreams*, “build it and they will come,” approach, it's more accurately, “when they come we can continue to build it together.”

Are you aware of the message you're sending about community to the visitors or new members at your church? What conditions have been set or might be intuited? If they're intentional, great—just make sure they're communicated clearly and often. If they're not intentional, however, what can be done to express something different?

Another helpful thought exercise is to consider to whom you believe the one another commands apply. In other words, do we need to honor, serve, and look out for the interests of *all* others?

Community is messy and the more people we welcome in, the messier it gets. There is no way around this, as much as we try to limit the mess, or hide the mess under the rug, or just close the door to the area where the mess exists. Storytelling will reveal some of the mess. You're encouraged to lean into that. You don't have to air dirty laundry, but at the same time you don't need to present something squeaky clean either. Maybe consider it an act of confessing to one another.

In any case, living out the one anothers in community can be a big ask, but we've been commanded to do just that. Pray for one another. Forgive. Love one another.

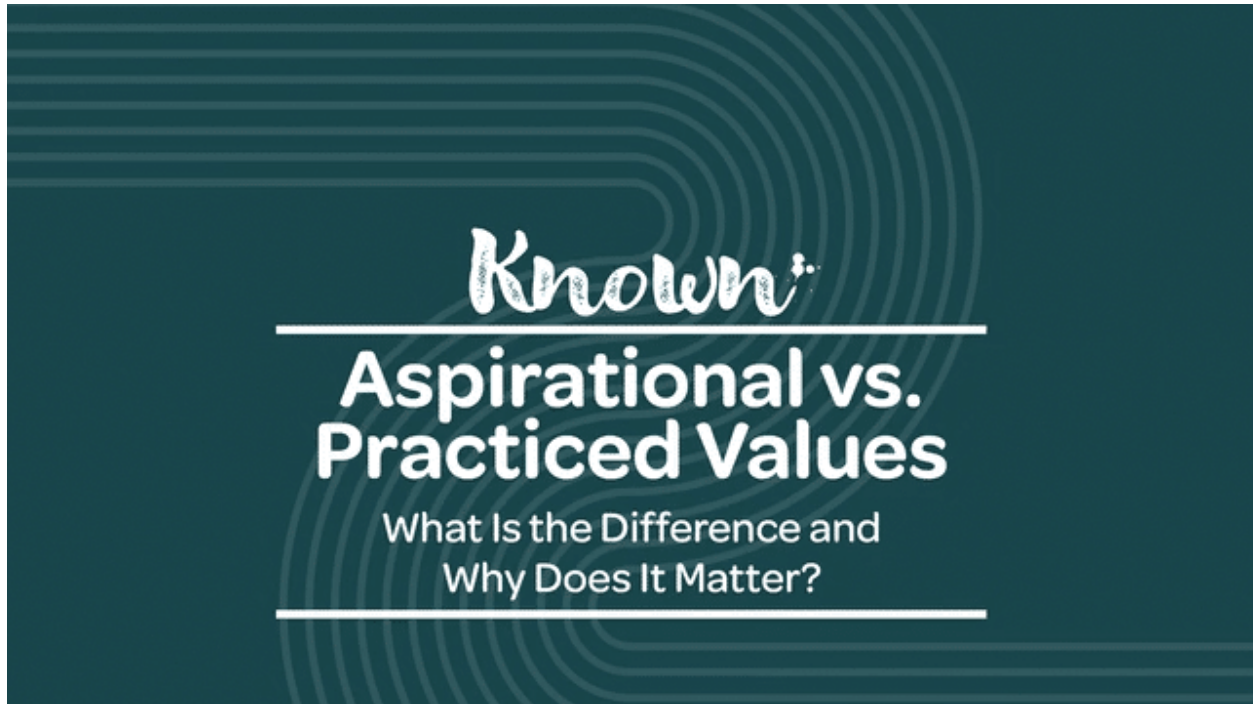


FIGURE 40: *ASPIRATIONAL VS. PRACTICED VALUES* TRAINING VIDEO
[HTTPS://VIMEO.COM/791545488/EBAAC2491C](https://vimeo.com/791545488/EBAAC2491C)

Known Training

Aspirational vs. Practiced Values: What is the Difference and Why Does it Matter?

According to the Barrett Values Centre, values are a reflection of what is important to us, what motivates us, and, along with our beliefs, greatly inform our decision-making. Values are a demonstrated reflection of our principles, ideals or standards of behavior.

But did you know there are two ways to discuss values? Simply put, one is an accurate reflection of what we do and who we are now, we call these **practiced values**. The other is an idealized version of who we want to be and hope to become, we call these **aspirational values**.

When we discuss our values, yet they're actions or realities we're not yet modeling, we risk looking out of touch if we do not acknowledge that these are aspirational. Aspirational values aren't bad, in fact they're often reflections of hopefulness, but it is important that we are clear that we're not yet there. Better yet, if we can demonstrate how our aspirational values are tied into who and what we want our church to be, *and* point to a plan that begins moving us toward the aspirational value being a practiced value, we're able to communicate our vision. As a general rule, aspirational values will be aligned with your church's vision. At least they should be.

Practiced values will be modeled in what we're actually doing, our mission. These are the values that would be included if you were to conduct a church-wide survey or ask your pastor friend down the street what they saw reflected by your church because practiced values are just that, practiced. They're seen. They're recognized. At least by others.

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But what if what we're doing and how we're interacting with others isn't in lockstep with our stated values, nor is it a reflection of who we hope to be? This is where knowing and understanding your culture, community, and context is important. Are some aspects of your culture overlooked because you know their heart or trust their intentions even though anyone who observed the behavior without the benefit of relationship would understand it differently? Is there a blind spot when looking at your community, leading you to prize one set of voices over another causing a gap in understanding? Has your context changed since you originally established your values, so your actions have adjusted to the new reality, but the way you talk about it hasn't? Recognizing misaligned values doesn't mean your church has done anything wrong, sometimes it is simply a reflection of a shift in culture, community, or context that has been intuitively responded to but our language and identifiers have failed to catch up. This is why it is important to periodically take the time to assess your values—practiced and aspirational—and consider how they relate to your mission and vision.



FIGURE 41: *MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES* TRAINING VIDEO

[HTTPS://VIMEO.COM/791545970/B35A1EC6E7](https://vimeo.com/791545970/b35a1ec6e7)

Known Training

Mission, Vision, and Values: How Are They Different, How Are They Alike, and Why Should I Care?

When we discuss mission, vision, and values, it's not uncommon to find ourselves using the terms interchangeably. Though the overlap that exists should you chart the three using a Venn Diagram has the potential to be sizable, they're not synonymous nor are they necessarily aligned.

Let's start at the beginning. For our purposes, the definitions of mission, vision, and values are:

Mission: What you're doing—your actions in the community, discipleship practices, ministry and service opportunities, how you engage children, youth, families, and singles, and what the day-to-day engagement of your church looks like.

Vision: Where you're going—these are the driving goals or aspirations, the plans for depth or growth, what's next and the hope that keeps you striving for what's next.

Values: Expressions of what matters most to you—principles, ideals or standards of behavior that you, as a church community, act upon and your behavior reflects. The goal is practiced values (a true reflection of who you are and what you're doing now) instead of aspirational values (who you hope to be/your intentions behind your behavior regardless of how others experience it).

In our healthiest state, personally and communally, what we're doing actively supports and moves us toward where we hope to go and both are visible reflections of what we claim to be our values. In other words, our mission drives us toward our vision, both of which are in line with our values. When all three are aligned, the overlap in the hypothetical Venn Diagram will be greater because all three elements

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will support and inform the others. For example, if your vision is to build a discipleship culture, your mission—what you're actually doing—could include service opportunities, small groups, bible studies, and teaching on personal spiritual practices, and you would value curiosity, and growth, and community, which would be demonstrated by what you do and spoken about clearly. Organizations outside of the church will often encourage discontinuing programs or activities that aren't clearly in alignment with the stated mission, vision, and values. That practice isn't as clear cut in the church with the various roles our members and leadership play and what is required of us organizationally, but it is still beneficial to take the time to consider what you're doing and why.

Not sure if your mission, vision, and values are aligned? Check out the [Mission, Vision, Values Alignment Check](#) worksheet and activity.

What about misaligned mission, vision, and values? In this hypothetical Venn Diagram, the three circles might barely touch, with the daily activities and programs moving the church in a different direction than the spoken vision, and reflecting practiced values that are anywhere close to the aspirational ones. In this scenario, the mission is leading you one way, but you're talking about a vision over there, all while your values communicate something different entirely. If you're in this state, you are probably very aware of the negative impact of these competing focus areas.

For most of us, however, we're not in complete alignment and we're not in such chaos that our mission, vision, and values taken on their own look like they represent three entirely different communities. Instead, we might have found ourselves one or two degrees off course, but recognize that should we fail to address these navigational shifts as they come—either through redirecting ourselves to better align with what we communicate or changing the way we talk about what we do, who we are, and where we're going to better reflect what is actually happening. This self awareness (church awareness, in this instance) helps leadership make decisions, church members have better clarity on what they are a part of, and the community in which you serve sees that who you say you are matches what they see you doing.

For corporations, understanding the relationship between these three elements is largely driven by their consumers, clients, and stockholders. Decisions are profit-driven and consumer-focused. There's nothing wrong with that for corporations because that's why they exist. But that's not why we exist. We exist to

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be Jesus' hands and feet and to learn how to see where Jesus is at work in the world and join in on that mission, with your church doing so in the context-specific way you've been called to.

Is that unique purpose reflected in your mission, vision, and values?



FIGURE 42: *HOW TO WRITE A MISSION AND VISION STATEMENT FOR YOUR CHURCH* TRAINING VIDEO

[HTTPS://VIMEO.COM/791545750/7A0F62082E](https://vimeo.com/791545750/7A0F62082E)

Known Training

How to Write a Mission and Vision Statement for Your Church

Two of the sessions of Known are centered on your church mission and vision statements, and the remaining sessions rely on them as well. If you've already developed these as a church, great! You'll start with what you have and use the session's question and story prompts to flesh it out. If you do not already have either a mission or vision statement, this brief training is intended to get you started on the right track. If you need more assistance after this training, ChurchLabs, the company that created Known, is available for consulting and training.

First things first, what are mission and vision statements? A vision statement should answer the basic question, what do we want to become, or as we ask in *Known*, where are we going? In other words, a vision statement is forward looking and intended to guide your church's efforts toward that goal. A vision statement should be short—aim for one sentence—and express the community's goal, not just the goal of one church leader. It should be clear, concise, and express who your church aims to be.

A mission statement is a compilation of the answers to who you are (who makes up your church as discussed, in part, in the Culture session, and who you want to reach and serve), what you value (why you do what you do), and how you live out your values (in most church, confusingly in this context, called mission). A good mission statement will be broad enough to capture the depth and breadth of who you are while being focused enough to distinguish your church from all others. It should express who you are now while leaving space for growth. Mission statements are often a bit longer than vision statements—aim for fewer than 120 words—while remaining clear, concise, and memorable.

Ultimately your vision and mission statements express who you are now—people, values, and how you operate in your community and the world—and who you hope to be moving forward. In corporate settings these are used to inform strategies and objectives and are used to ensure efficiency. In the church setting they are good ways to establish what makes your church unique and to express how you see God moving you in the future. They also help ensure staff alignment, member buy-in, and provide something for visitors and new

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members to grab onto as they seek to determine if your church is where they feel called to commit and invest.

Practically speaking, one way to establish church vision and mission statements is to train those whose input you'd like (depending on church size, culture, and structure this could be the entire congregation, lay leaders, ministry leads, small group leaders, elders, board members or the church staff) and ask them to write their own vision and mission statements and turn them in. Once they're all in, a select group can compile, combine, find themes, discuss outliers, and create a single vision statement and a single mission statement based on input. Typically at this point it's a good idea to recirculate the integrated statements to those from whom you originally sought input and request their feedback on the new version. This iterative process can continue for as many rounds as you see fit. Once you're satisfied with the final version you're ready to share it with the world.

Though both statements should be succinct, clear, and memorable, they're, in essence, the elevator pitch of who your church is and where you're going, not the full story. Known's story-based, question-driven approach will help you share the complete picture of your church, allowing new members to know where they're committing and investing.

Sources: David, Fred, and Forest David. "The Business Vision and Mission ." Chapter 2. In *Strategic Management: Concepts and Cases: A Competitive Advantage Approach*. 16th ed. Pearson Education Limited, 2017.

Known Quick Guides

Known Quick Guides are logistic and technical focused resources created to aid *Known* implementation. Designed to walk the line between highlighting granular details yet not being prescriptive in approach, Quick Guides are intended to provide guidelines and helpful tips while still maintaining a focus on *Known*'s prioritization of customization.

Seven branded *Known* Quick Guides are included below.

Known Quick Guide

Format: Logistics 101

Launching *Known* for the first time? This is a step-by-step guide, helping you determine most of the foundational logistics for your *Known* experience. Want more guidance? Reach out to a *Known* consultant for one-on-one help with the process.

Determine Best Fit

This is where you determine your *Known* format and delivery method. Your church needs and culture will help determine the format that is best for you.

Format

Known is designed to be best experienced as an 8-week program, but can be completed as 3 separate, sequential events, or as a weekend experience. The 8-week experience will follow the session guides as is. If doing 3 separate events, the first will follow sessions 1, 2, and 3, the second will cover sessions 4, 5, and 6, and the final event will use sessions 7 and 8. In a weekend experience the session guides will be completed in order, but with a condensed timeline.

Delivery Method

Who will tell your stories? And will they be in person at each session or video recordings? This answer likely won't be set in stone until you've completed the Tell Your Story: Session Script Builder, but is something you need to begin considering now.

Consider Timing and Participants

Based on church size, frequency of visitors/new members, space, and natural rhythm you'll need to consider several factors that will influence how you design your church's *Known* experience.

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Timing

You'll want to ask yourself how often you plan to offer *Known* and on what schedule? Will it be part of small groups? Will you launch a new session quarterly? Offer *Known* annually? If possible, consider aligning the end of *Known* with ministry, group, or service launch dates so there is a natural next step for new members.

Participants

You'll also need to consider how many people you anticipate participating in *Known* with each iteration? Based on this number you'll need to consider:

1. Where will *Known* be hosted?
2. Will breakout groups be needed? If so, how many?
3. How many connectors will I need?
4. Who is the best person to tell each part of our story? You might not know this answer now, but consider this element as you move through the remainder of the implementation steps.

Set a Launch Date Goal and Activate the Timeline

Determine your launch date goal to help you determine the necessary timing for the remaining steps.

1. Start Tell Your Story: Session Script Builder at least 2 months before launch date. Aim to complete Tell Your Story portion 6 weeks before the launch date.
2. Begin Identifying and Inviting Connectors at least 6 weeks before the launch date, with a team in place at least 1 month before launch.
3. Equip your team, starting trainings 1 month before launch.
4. Communicate *Known* to your members 1 month before launch, and continue consistently until launch. Use the Communication Plan Quick Guide to help.
5. Open registration for *Known* as soon as you begin announcing it.
6. Distribute participant Tell Your Story guides 2 weeks before launch

Known Launch

You did it! Your preparation has gotten you to the place where you're launching *Known* at your church. The week before launch date has some special considerations.

1. Pray over the space. Though prayer isn't specifically outlined in *Known* sessions, allowing for your church's culture to guide the decisions to include it in new member

programming or not, the assumption and expectation is that leaders and Connectors *will be* covering the participants and locations in prayer prior to and during *Known*.

2. Set the space. Hospitality is central to the success of *Known*, and creating a welcoming atmosphere is key.
3. Email your participants. You've communicated the necessary dates, times, and locations many times now, but there are some participants who will still need the reminder. Use this email to welcome participants, remind them of logistics, and vision cast what is to come.
4. Pre-Print Name Tags. They don't have to be fancy, but they do need to be ready before participants arrive. This lets participants know you were expecting them and are prepared for them. It's a show of welcoming hospitality that sets the stage for the rest of the experience.

Known Quick Guide

Communication Plan

For many churches the issue isn't their lack of opportunities or ministry offerings, but that people don't know about them or they know they exist, but don't know how to sign up. Like all relationships, the most important element is communication. Whether you have an entire team dedicated to church communication or it's you and a volunteer using email or social media, this training will help you consider your current strategy and identify areas that can be revised, reinvigorated, or reinvented.

What You're Communicating

Known is a relationship building experience, and all relationship experts will tell you the same thing—the key to any good relationship is communication. People need to know the basics of what *Known* is, when it starts, what is expected of them, and how to sign up. You'll also want to communicate where or to whom they can go for more information.

Specifics to Consider

What are the three most important things you want people to know about *Known*? Communicate those consistently and share where they can get more information if they're interested. You want to inform without bogging members down with too much information.

How You're Communicating

One of the first things that needs to be shared with visitors and new members is how your church typically communicates. Are events, opportunities, and information shared primarily on your website? Newsletter? Social media? An app? How do people know where to look or who to ask if they're interested in becoming involved or have a question about something they've heard mentioned? It doesn't matter how much effort you've put into something or how much someone wants to be a part of it if they don't know where to find basic information about how to do so. Since *Known* is intended for new members, considering the basics of what they know about your communication methods is crucial.

Specifics to Consider

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Who is communicating about *Known*? If the communication method includes in-person announcements, who is responsible for those?

How do people sign up for *Known*?

How do participants access their *Tell Your Story Participant Guide*?

The tone of communication is also included in “how.” We all know the difference between an invitation and truly being wanted. Make sure that you’re communicating to new members that they’re wanted in your church community and that *Known* is the way to facilitate that.

When You’re Communicating

The timeline for communicating is key. Allowing people enough time to plan, but not so much time that an announcement can be ignored, assuming there will be time to act later, is the sweet spot for considering when to communicate.

Specifics to Consider

What is your launch date for *Known*? Work backwards from that date to establish your communicating timelines. (See [Launch Timeline Quick Guide](#) for examples.)

How frequently will you communicate about *Known*? Consider the intervals for in-person announcements, social media posts, email blasts, and other methods.

Why You’re Communicating

The ‘why’ is often the driving force for anything your church is doing, but can often get lost in favor of sharing logistics first. Remember to keep the ‘why’ front and center so new members understand the importance and current members can articulate it to those they meet, too, as they’re acting as the front lines of the church.

Specifics to Consider

Do your current members understand *Known*? Even though the program isn’t specifically designed for them, the more people who can explain the importance of the experience increases new members’ chances of participating.

What is your church’s ‘why’? How does *Known* fit within the mission, vision, community, and culture of your church?

Known Quick Guide

Who's Who in *Known*?

Roles and Responsibilities

Staff Champion

For *Known* to be successful, there must be at least one person on staff or church leadership who is championing the cause. In this role you're celebrating the stories you're seeing and hearing from new members and inviting others to celebrate with you, while providing logistical support, insight, and access that is most often reserved for church staff members.

The Staff Champion's solo responsibilities include ownership of the *Known* external communication strategy, providing support and oversight to the Facilitator, and telling stories of *Known* successes. The Staff Champion will work with the Facilitator to complete the initial Tell Your Story activity and Implementation Guide, recruit Connectors, lead or support training, and be advocates for *Known* in your church.

Facilitator

Typically a church staff member or appointed ministry lead, the Facilitator is the point person for *Known*, oversees logistics, and acts as (or recruits) the lead storyteller. In this role you're the face of *Known*—the one people know to speak to if they want to participate or have a question—and providing leadership to Connectors and participants and overseeing the success of the sessions.

The Facilitator (with the assistance of the Staff Champion as needed) is responsible for the logistics of the experience: Scheduling, internal communication, organizing Connectors and participants, finding and reserving space, recruiting and overseeing Connectors, welcoming participants...the list goes on, and while you, the Facilitator is

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responsible for overseeing these things happen, it is not necessary for you to do them yourself. Some of the most successful iterations of this experience saw these responsibilities shared by a team that was overseen by the Facilitator. Working with the Staff Champion you will complete the initial Tell Your Story activity and Implementation Guide, recruit Connectors, lead training, and be an advocate for *Known* in your church.

As the Facilitator, you can be a culture creator. If you want *Known* to be invitational, start inviting. If you want it to be welcoming, model that with the way you welcome Connectors and participants. Beyond simple logistics, you are responsible for making *Known* a safe space where people can share openly and maintain confidentiality. What you do will be seen and followed and will ultimately set the culture of the experience. So be intentional about the actions you take and tone you set.

Connectors

Connectors are the heart of *Known*, with their continued investment beyond the official sessions the key to the success of *Known* at your church. In this role you'll welcome new members and aid their full integration into the church community, knowing that each participant will have different support needs and their timelines for engagement will vary.

Connectors will attend and participate in each session of the *Known* experience, helping to create a personal connection between new members and the current church community. They will complete their own Participant: Tell Your Story guide before each session and share their story as part of *Known*, while encouraging new members to share theirs as well. In situations where breakout groups are needed, Connectors will also act as the breakout group facilitators. In this capacity you're not expected to have all of the answers (believe it or not, it's actually better if you don't!), but you will be getting the conversation flowing, setting the tone for the discussion, and keep it moving smoothly, not necessarily be the main voice heard throughout the session. Because of this, you'll need 1 Connector for every 4-6 participants.

After the *Known* experience ends, Connectors will continue in their capacity as accessible and knowledgeable church leaders available to answer questions, check in on those who have completed *Known* to ensure a guided, smooth transition between welcome programming and self-directed community engagement, and make

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connections between new and existing church members to help build integrated community.

Storytellers

Storytellers are those who will share the story during the *Known* sessions. The [Tell Your Story: Session Script Builder](#) includes prompts encouraging the Staff Champion and Facilitator to consider whose input is needed to tell the fullest story for each session and who the best person is to tell that story to the large group at *Known*. The storyteller can be the Staff Champion, Facilitator, a Connector, or any other church member. The storyteller can also be a different person for each session. This can be a good way to introduce multiple leaders and members within your church.

Storytellers will use the responses to the story prompts, Stakeholder Input Survey responses, and their own experiences to tell the stories of your church for each session. The specific stories can be collected and developed by the storytellers, or can be curated by the Staff Champion and Facilitator and provided to the storyteller.

Participants

Participants are those who are new to the Church or new to *your* church. They are seeking connection, guidance on how to become involved and invested in your church, and have taken the first step toward committing to being a part of your church community.

With the aid of Connectors, participants will leave *Known* with a better understanding of the church and how they can become a part of the larger story. Because each participant has different support needs and will become engaged on their own timeline, they'll know that Connectors are there to support them for as long as they reasonably need.

Known Quick Guide

Connector 101

Connectors are the heart of *Known*, with their continued investment beyond the official sessions the key to the success of *Known* at your church and are core to the overall strategy. In this role Connectors welcome new members and aid their full integration into the church community, knowing that each participant will have different support needs and their timelines for engagement will vary. The goal is to help participants move smoothly and confidently into full, self-directed engagement in the church. Connectors are the steady guide on the journey.

Selecting Connectors

Connectors will help new members bridge the gap between facilitated programming and self-directed investment. Connectors will also participate in telling their story during sessions, helping new members create personal connections early with established members of your church community. Because of this you'll want to select Connectors who are well connected themselves—Do they know where to go or who to ask to get information? They don't need all the answers, but they do need to know where to look. Are they engaging and personable and willing to fully invest and commit themselves into being known and seeking to know others? Are they natural includers? These are the people you want to consider as Connectors.

Step 1: Make a list of potential Connectors in your congregation. Ask for suggestions for a broad group of people you trust.

Step 2: Make the ask. Ask members to be Connectors, explaining the role, responsibilities, and why you think they'd be a good fit.

Step 3: Communicate the schedule. Make sure potential Connectors are aware that their involvement is expected to go beyond the official *Known* sessions and communication with participants is expected to happen outside of the *Known*

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sessions as well. This is an above-and-beyond role, so select people who have the ability and the margin to meet these needs.

Before *Known*

Connectors will complete *Known* training before the first session of *Known* is launched. This training will provide you with a basic understanding of *Known* and your expected role.

Before the first session you'll also want to pray for the participants who will be in your group (even if you don't know their names yet, pray that the right people show up at the right time). Once you do have participant names and contact information, reach out and introduce yourself and share the launch information again.

During *Known*

Connectors will attend and participate in each session of the *Known* experience, helping to create a personal connection between new members and the current church community.

You will complete your own [Participant: Your Story](#) guide before each session and share your story as part of *Known*, while encouraging new members to share theirs as well. In situations where breakout groups are needed, Connectors will also act as the breakout group facilitators. In this capacity you're not expected to have all of the answers (believe it or not, it's actually better if you don't!), but you will be getting the conversation flowing, setting the tone for the discussion, and keep it moving smoothly, not necessarily be the main voice heard throughout the session. Because of this, you'll need 1 Connector for every 4-6 participants. If you're serving as a breakout group facilitator you might also be asked to lead communication efforts for your group which will primarily consist of emailing participants prior to sessions and following up afterward using the email templates provided.

During *Known* you'll also connect with participants outside of the official session times do help foster a deeper relationship. This can be done through email, over coffee, check-in with texts, or inviting participants to sit with you during the weekly church service. Be creative and choose a method that matches your personality and capacity.

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After *Known*

Connectors will continue in their capacity as accessible and knowledgeable church leaders available to answer questions, check in on those who have completed *Known* to ensure a guided, smooth transition between welcome programming and self-directed community engagement, and make connections between new and existing church members to help build integrated community.

This role is not specific or time bound because every participant will have different support needs and will take varied amounts of time to bridge the gap between guided participation and self-directed engagement. You're not responsible for participants engaging, but you are available to provide encouragement, connections, and support as needed. Think of it as a parent of a teenager or young adult as opposed to a parent of a toddler. You're no longer needed for day-to-day tasks or to explain everything, but you're available as a safety net as new things are attempted and are able to explain new experiences as they arise.

Though not time bound, the role of Connector isn't intended to go on forever—ideally you'll gradually provide less and less direct support until it's no longer needed—you can continue to check in on participants periodically, communicating a continued investment in who they are, what they're doing, and where they hope to go.

Known Quick Guide

Launch Timeline

This *quick guide* breaks down the recommended scheduling timeline to launch *Known* at your church.

Step 1: Set your launch date goal. You'll work backwards from this date to determine the necessary timing for the remaining steps.

Step 2: Begin recording your church's stories in the **Tell Your Story: Session Script Builder** at least 2 months before your launch date. Aim to complete recording your stories 4-6 weeks before your launch date.

Step 3: Begin identifying and inviting Connectors at least 6 weeks before the launch date, with a team in place at least 1 month before launch.

Step 4: Equip your team, starting trainings 1 month before launch.

Step 5: Begin sharing about *Known* to your church members 1 month before your launch date. Continue communicating consistently until the launch.

Step 6: Open *Known* registration as soon as it is announced to members.

Step 7: Distribute participant **Tell Your Story** guides up to 2 weeks before your launch date.

Step 8: Remind participants about the launch date with a reminder email the night before or day of the first session meeting.

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Known Quick Guide

Essentials List

This one-page document compiles information new members need to know into one place. Because each church is unique, use the section headings and included examples below to help generate ideas to match your needs. Do you have culture-specific information beyond what is found on your church website? Include that too, to help new members feel included.

Service Time(s)

- Childcare is only offered during the second service
- This location has ASL interpretation
- Our services officially start at 10:15 but in practice we never start until 10:30

Discipleship

- Groups launch with this rhythm and you join by signing up online
- Mission teams are announced in January and you can find out more here
- Sunday School is offered between services with classes for all ages

Ministry Opportunities

- Sign up here to serve on Sunday mornings on one of our ministry teams
- Support our family ministries at our annual fall festival

Communication

- Our primary method of communication is:
- To receive it/gain access, sign up/email here/check social media
- If you have questions, _____ is the best place to start/person to ask
- The best way to share information with the church is by contacting/accessing/updating

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Known Quick Guide

Script Builder

This resource provides a high-level guide for how to complete the Script Builder. The first and most important rule is that **the only wrong way to complete it is alone**. The stories of your church are best told through a compilation of the individual stories that make up your community. Each session will benefit from different voices being part of the conversation—and could likely benefit from different voices leading the conversation during *Known*—with suggestions for who to consider asking included within the Script Builder resource itself.

Script Building Methods That Have Worked for Other Churches

- Surveying the elder or leadership team.
- Inviting the church staff together to brainstorm and share stories.
- Sending session-specific surveys to the corresponding lay leaders and designating several staff or leadership team members to collect and combine the responses into a single story.
- Assigning individual sessions to corresponding staff or lay leaders and asking them to compile appropriate stories from their team(s).

Regardless of the method selected, the more stories that can be considered and included, the more holistic the story of your church told within *Known* will be.

Additional Tips

- Completing the Script Builder isn't a one-time task. As your story evolves, you'll want to share the new chapters that have been written or the previous stories that have been edited or revised. Sometimes the previous chapter is worth telling, too, but don't forget to include the current chapters as your story has continued being written.

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- Complete Session 1 last. Because Session 1 includes an overview of what is covered in the remaining sessions, you'll essentially complete it as you move through establishing the stories you wish to tell for sessions 2-8.
- If there are seemingly conflicting stories that arise, you do not need to select just one and ignore the other. Is it possible that there is an overarching story that encompasses both? Is the actual story a combination of the two? Is one an outlier but still worth sharing as such?
- Taking the time to consider that the story could be different than what you've shared in the past is worthwhile, especially the parts of your story you tell most often. Don't be too quick to answer any of the prompts because you might be missing an important element worth including.
- Don't be afraid of your story or edit too many parts out. You're asking participants to be vulnerable so consider the importance of modeling that posture.
- Your story is still being written, so it's okay if some sections don't feel complete. It's possible they feel that way because they aren't! Tell the story you have and take note of any elements you'd like to add the next time Known is offered at your church.

Known Session Scripts

Known Session Scripts are general frameworks for facilitators to use as they are running *Known*. They provide a suggested time breakdown for each meeting, two pre-written session-specific scripts to introduce the main idea of each meeting time and to tease the topic for the following week, guidelines for where to insert the customized stories developed through the Tell Your Story: Session Script Builder resource, and session-specific facilitation tips and techniques for the small group portion of *Known*.

Eight branded *Known* Session Scripts are included below.

Known Session Scripts

Session 1: History and Welcome

Pre-Session Prep

Using your answers from the Story Prompts and Session Builder, determine:

- What is the main story you want to tell?
- Whose stories will you include?
 - Reach out and gather the stories.
 - Pull out themes, specific quotes, and any full story you'd like to include.
- Who will tell this part of the story?
 - Invite the storyteller(s) to the session of *Known*.
 - Explain their role and the story you'd like them to tell.
 - Provide the highlights or any additional story details they're to include.
(Best practice is to share a draft of the transcript the storyteller will use at least 48 hours before the session to allow time to edit and align.)

Large Group

30 Minutes

Facilitator:

- Welcome participants to *Known*.
- Introduce your *Known* facilitation team, highlighting the role of Connectors.
- Explain the format and logistics of your church's *Known* experience.
 - Will storytellers be in person, video, or a hybrid?
 - What is the schedule?
 - What is the time breakdown of each session?
 - Will there be breakout groups during the participant storytelling small group time? If so, where do they meet?
 - Include any other information that will help participants know what to expect.

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- Introduce *Known*.
 - Using the responses to the questions within Session 1 Story Prompts, tell the story of *Known*.
 - Include what you hope participants get out of *Known*, the expectations for Connectors and participants, the reason behind the continued Connector role, and how answers from the Tell Your Story prompts will be shared. Reiterate that nobody will be required or forced to tell any story they do not want to, but that storytelling is the avenue *Known* uses to build relationships that aid future investment and commitment between new members and the church.
- Introduce this session's Storyteller.
 - Why are they the one(s) telling this session's story?
 - What role do they play in the church/where are new members most likely to see them outside of *Known*?

Storyteller:

- Using the responses to the questions within Session 1 Story Prompts and Stakeholder Input Surveys, tell the story of the history of your church.
- Remember to include brief introductions to your church's people, mission, vision, values, and culture in your story.

Small Group

60 Minutes

Facilitator/Connector:

- Introductions - consider using the participant "Preface" question as an icebreaker. [*What made you happiest as a child? What makes you happiest now?*]
- Small group time is participant focused, but especially for the first session you'll need to heavily facilitate conversation.
 - Start with general questions about the large group content: "what is your response to what you heard in the large group time?" or "Did the storyteller leave you with any questions?" or "What do you think about the story we just heard?"
 - Move to allowing participants to tell part of their story based on the story prompts they prepared before the meeting.

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- If participants are reluctant to be the first to share, have a Connector share their story first, or whenever there is a lull in conversation.
- Nobody is required to share their story, which means there could be some small group times that are quieter than others. If there is a long lull, consider partnering off participants to share in smaller groups which can be less intimidating. The goal isn't to make anyone's *Known* experience look exactly alike, but to help facilitate relationship building through storytelling.
- Ask good questions. Encourage participants to ask follow-up questions of each other, but consider setting ground rules for what kinds of questions or how many can follow each participant's story.

Regroup

5 Minutes

Facilitator (if not using breakout groups)/Connectors if using breakout groups):

- Thank participants and Connectors for coming to *Known*
- Give announcements or reminders, specifically encouraging participants to complete their "The Story Continues" challenge to call or meet up with a fellow participant or Connector during the week.
- Give a teaser for next session's topic: Mission.
 - Teaser Script: *"Next time we meet we'll be discussing Mission, what the church does, what you do, and how they're a reflection of the mission Jesus has for the church. Remember to complete the Story Prompts in your Tell Your Story guide to help prepare for our small group storytelling and discussion."*

Known⁺ Session Scripts

Session 2: Mission

Pre-Session Prep

Using your answers from the Story Prompts and Session Builder, determine:

- What is the main story you want to tell?
- Whose stories will you include?
 - Reach out and gather the stories.
 - Pull out themes, specific quotes, and any full story you'd like to include.
- Who will tell this part of the story?
 - Invite the storyteller(s) to the session of *Known*.
 - Explain their role and the story you'd like them to tell.
 - Provide the highlights or any additional story details they're to include.
(Best practice is to share a draft of the transcript the storyteller will use at least 48 hours before the session to allow time to edit and align.)

Large Group

30 Minutes

Facilitator:

- Welcome participants back to *Known*.
- Reintroduce *Known* facilitation team and Connectors and provide a brief reminder of how the session time is broken up and what participants can expect for the session.
- Briefly introduce the main idea of Session 2: Mission.
 - Intro Script: *"This week we're discussing mission. Jesus' mission was summed up as doing 'His Father's business.' In other words, his mission was what he was doing. When we're talking about the church's mission or our personal mission, it's the same. Our mission is what we're doing."*

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- Share a short story about your engagement in the mission of your church, or your mission personally.
- Introduce this session's Storyteller
 - Why are they the one(s) telling this session's story?
 - What role do they play in the church/where are new members most likely to see them outside of *Known*?

Storyteller:

- Using the responses to the questions within Session 2 Story Prompts and Stakeholder Input Surveys, tell the story of the mission of your church.
- Remember to provide specific examples of how participants can become involved in the church's mission in your story.

Small Group

60 Minutes

Facilitator/Connector:

- Introductions - consider using the participant "Preface" question as an icebreaker. [What activity do you think is worth taking a long time to do or complete? Or, what could you spend hours doing?]
- Small group time is participant focused, but on the second session you'll still need to highly facilitate conversation. Encourage participants to tell stories, invite conversation, and model asking good follow-on questions.
 - Reminders and Tips:
 - If a participant is hesitant to share, don't force it. The group needs to be a safe space and some participants will be more comfortable listening than talking.
 - Encourage Connectors to share their stories, too.
 - Try out different group arrangements to determine which fits your particular participants best. Pair participants off, share stories as a whole group, divide by even or odd birthdays. Be creative and pay attention to the way the group responds to the various modes.

Regroup

5 Minutes

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Facilitator:

- Thank participants and Connectors for coming to *Known*.
- Give announcements or reminders, specifically encouraging participants to complete their “The Story Continues” challenge to plan a way for their faith to act outside of the walls of the church this week.
- Give a teaser for next session’s topic: Vision.
 - Teaser Script: *“Next time we meet we’ll be discussing Vision; where the church is going, what you hope to do, and how they’re a reflection of the vision Jesus has for the church. Remember to complete the Story Prompts in your Tell Your Story guide to help prepare for our small group storytelling and discussion.”*

Known Session Scripts

Session 3: Vision

Pre-Session Prep

Using your answers from the Story Prompts and Session Builder, determine:

- What is the main story you want to tell?
- Whose stories will you include?
 - Reach out and gather the stories
 - Pull out themes, specific quotes, and any full story you'd like to include
- Who will tell this part of the story?
 - Invite the storyteller(s) to the session of *Known*
 - Explain their role and the story you'd like them to tell
 - Provide the highlights or any additional story details they're to include
(Best practice is to share a draft of the transcript the storyteller will use at least 48 hours before the session to allow time to edit and align.)

Large Group

30 Minutes

Facilitator:

- Welcome participants to *Known*
- Briefly introduce the main idea of Session 3: Vision.
 - Intro Script: *"This week we're discussing vision. We learned last session that Jesus' mission was summed up as doing 'His Father's business.' He determined that by being in close contact with his father, praying and seeking God's guidance in all that he was doing. This practice helped ensure that Jesus' actions were all leading toward his ultimate vision. They helped determine his direction. For the church and each of us personally, our vision can be defined as where we hope to go. It is the goal or dream or pull to do something that keeps our actions, our mission, heading in the right direction."*

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- Share a short story about your engagement in the vision of your church, or your vision personally.
- Introduce this session's Storyteller
 - Why are they the one(s) telling this session's story?
 - What role do they play in the church/where are new members most likely to see them outside of *Known*?

Storyteller:

- Using the responses to the questions within Session 3 Story Prompts and Stakeholder Input Surveys, tell the story of the vision of your church.
- Remember to provide specific examples of how participants can become involved in the church's vision in your story.

Small Group

60 Minutes

Facilitator/Connector:

- Introductions - consider using the participant "Preface" question as an icebreaker. *[Describe a time in your life where you were on an adventure. What did it teach you?]*
- Small group time is participant focused, and by the third session you'll hopefully be able to truly facilitate with less direct guiding of the conversation. Continue to encourage participants to tell stories, invite conversation, and model asking good follow-on questions.
 - Reminders and Tips:
 - If a participant is hesitant to share, don't force it. The group needs to be a safe space and some participants will be more comfortable listening than talking.
 - Encourage Connectors to share their stories, too.
 - Try out different group arrangements to determine which fits your particular participants best. Pair participants off, share stories as a whole group, divide by even or odd birthdays. Be creative and pay attention to the way the group responds to the various modes.

Regroup

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

5 Minutes

Facilitator:

- Thank participants and Connectors for coming to *Known*
- Give announcements or reminders, specifically encouraging participants to complete their “The Story Continues” challenge to record the things they’re doing naturally/already doing (habits, hobbies, disposition, job, etc) that are helping to further their personal vision this week.
- Give a teaser for next session’s topic: Values.
 - Teaser Script: *“Next time we meet we’ll be discussing Values: how the church expresses practiced values, what your personal values reveal, and how our values are a reflection of Jesus in and through our church. Remember to complete the Story Prompts in your Tell Your Story guide to help prepare for our small group storytelling and discussion.”*

Known Session Scripts

Session 4: Values

Pre-Session Prep

Using your answers from the Story Prompts and Session Builder, determine:

- What is the main story you want to tell?
- Whose stories will you include?
 - Reach out and gather the stories
 - Pull out themes, specific quotes, and any full story you'd like to include
- Who will tell this part of the story?
 - Invite the storyteller(s) to the session of *Known*
 - Explain their role and the story you'd like them to tell
 - Provide the highlights or any additional story details they're to include
(Best practice is to share a draft of the transcript the storyteller will use at least 48 hours before the session to allow time to edit and align.)

Large Group

30 Minutes

Facilitator:

- Welcome participants to *Known*
- Briefly introduce the main idea of Session 4: Values.
 - Intro Script: *"This week we're discussing values. The last two sessions covered our mission and vision—what we're doing and where we're going—both of which are determined by our values. What we're doing is the best indicator of our practiced values, those ideas that drive our actions. Our vision can be representative of our aspirational values, the ideas we'd like to represent, even if our current actions aren't yet aligned. Each of us, and the church as a whole, has values we live by. Our practiced values are seen by others in what we say and do. Our aspirational values, should we decide to turn them into practiced*

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values, will determine our vision and the actions we'll take to see it through."

- Share a short story about your engagement in the values of your church, or your personal values.
- Introduce this session's Storyteller
 - Why are they the one(s) telling this session's story?
 - What role do they play in the church/where are new members most likely to see them outside of *Known*?

Storyteller:

- Using the responses to the questions within Session 4 Story Prompts and Stakeholder Input Surveys, tell the story of the values of your church.
- Remember to include examples of how individual members impact and reflect the values of your church, highlighting, if possible, stories from when people were new members.

Small Group

60 Minutes

Facilitator/Connector:

- Introductions - consider using the participant "Preface" question as an icebreaker. [*What rules are important to you and why?*]
- Small group time is participant focused, and facilitation at the halfway point of the experience can typically be more hands off than it is at the beginning. Continue to encourage participants to tell stories, invite conversation, and model asking good follow-on questions.
 - Reminders and Tips:
 - If a participant is hesitant to share, don't force it. The group needs to be a safe space and some participants will be more comfortable listening than talking.
 - Encourage Connectors to share their stories, too.
 - Try out different group arrangements to determine which fits your particular participants best. Pair participants off, share stories as a whole group, divide by even or odd birthdays. Be creative and pay attention to the way the group responds to the various modes.

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Regroup

5 Minutes

Facilitator:

- Thank participants and Connectors for coming to *Known*
- Give announcements or reminders, specifically encouraging participants to complete their “The Story Continues” challenge to make a list of their personal values and reflect at the end of each day how well their actions reflected them.
- Give a teaser for next session's topic: Community.
 - Teaser Script: *“Next time we meet we’ll be discussing community and the integral role it plays in our lives and the life of the church. Remember to complete the Story Prompts in your Tell Your Story guide to help prepare for our small group storytelling and discussion.”*

Known Session Scripts

Session 5: Community

Pre-Session Prep

Using your answers from the Story Prompts and Session Builder, determine:

- What is the main story you want to tell?
- Whose stories will you include?
 - Reach out and gather the stories.
 - Pull out themes, specific quotes, and any full story you'd like to include.
- Who will tell this part of the story?
 - Invite the storyteller(s) to the session of *Known*.
 - Explain their role and the story you'd like them to tell.
 - Provide the highlights or any additional story details they're to include.
(Best practice is to share a draft of the transcript the storyteller will use at least 48 hours before the session to allow time to edit and align.)

Large Group

30 Minutes

Facilitator:

- Welcome participants to *Known*.
- Briefly introduce the main idea of Session 5: Community.
 - Intro Script: *"This week we're discussing community. Jesus' life and ministry are marked by the importance of community. His disciples were an established community around Jesus and his works took place within community and for the benefit of community. Likewise, the "one another" commands remind us of the importance community has in living out our own faith. Community is integral to discipleship and stories build community."*
 - Share a short story about your engagement in the community of your church, or your personal community.

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- Introduce this session's Storyteller.
 - Why are they the one(s) telling this session's story?
 - What role do they play in the church/where are new members most likely to see them outside of *Known*?

Storyteller:

- Using the responses to the questions within Session 5 Story Prompts and Stakeholder Input Surveys, tell the story of the community within your church.
- Remember to include stories about how new members can become engaged in community, the internal and external impact of community (how do you see the effect of your church community both within the walls of your church and beyond?), and highlight any rhythms associated with community involvement (when do small groups start, when can new members join ministry teams, etc).

Small Group

60 Minutes

Facilitator/Connector:

- Introductions - consider using the participant "Preface" question as an icebreaker. [*What role do you typically play in community? If you could play any other role, what would it be?*]
- Small group time is participant focused, and particularly during a session focused on community, you'll want to intentionally model the role storytelling—both sharing our stories with others and holding the stories others share—can have on community at your church.
 - Reminders and Tips:
 - Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil, author of *Roadmap to Reconciliation 2.0*, writes, "Chaos is a necessary stage in the community-building process. It won't last forever, but we can't skip this part no matter how much we might like to pass over it.... Human beings actually need disorder and a sense of disequilibrium in order to grow and change. We need chaos in order for transformation to take place." Take heart. If you're feeling a sense of chaos in your group, you're doing it correctly.

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- If a participant is hesitant to share, don't force it. The group needs to be a safe space and some participants will be more comfortable listening than talking.
- Encourage Connectors to share their stories, too.
- Try out different group arrangements to determine which fits your particular participants best. Pair participants off, share stories as a whole group, divide by even or odd birthdays. Be creative and pay attention to the way the group responds to the various modes.

Regroup

5 Minutes

Facilitator:

- Thank participants and Connectors for coming to *Known*.
- Give announcements or reminders, specifically encouraging participants to complete their "The Story Continues" challenge to meet up with another *Known* participant this week to share more of their stories with one another.
- Give a teaser for next session's topic: Culture.
 - Teaser Script: *"Next time we meet we'll be discussing the culture of our church. When we take our mission, vision, values, and community together, the result is our church's holistic culture. Every one of us comes from specific cultures and represents different cultures, meaning when we come together within the community of our church, the culture within our church necessarily changes as a reflection of our diverse body. Remember to complete the Story Prompts in your Tell Your Story guide to help prepare for our small group storytelling and discussion."*

Source: Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation 2.0: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2020)

Known Session Scripts

Session 6: Culture

Pre-Session Prep

Using your answers from the Story Prompts and Session Builder, determine:

- What is the main story you want to tell?
- Whose stories will you include?
 - Reach out and gather the stories.
 - Pull out themes, specific quotes, and any full story you'd like to include.
- Who will tell this part of the story?
 - Invite the storyteller(s) to the session of *Known*.
 - Explain their role and the story you'd like them to tell.
 - Provide the highlights or any additional story details they're to include.
(Best practice is to share a draft of the transcript the storyteller will use at least 48 hours before the session to allow time to edit and align.)

Large Group

30 Minutes

Facilitator:

- Welcome participants to *Known*.
- Briefly introduce the main idea of Session 6: Culture.
 - Intro Script: *"This week we're discussing culture. Jesus lived in a real place, at a specific time in history, with a real group of people, so like us, Jesus was a part of, and contributing to, his culture. Authors Leonard Sweet and Michael Beck, in their book "Contextual Intelligence" remind us, 'every context has a language and every culture has a language.' In this session we're seeking to teach everyone the basics of how to speak and understand the cultural language of our church. Likewise, we're seeking to learn to speak and understand the native cultural language spoken by one another."*

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

- Share a short story about your engagement within the culture of your church, or your personal culture.
- Introduce this session's Storyteller.
 - Why are they the one(s) telling this session's story?
 - What role do they play in the church/where are new members most likely to see them outside of *Known*?

Storyteller:

- Using the responses to the questions within Session 6 Story Prompts and Stakeholder Input Surveys, tell the story of the culture of your church.
- Remember to include the impact your church's people, mission, vision, and values have on the culture of your church, and highlight the impact new members have had in the past within your story.

Small Group

60 Minutes

Facilitator/Connector:

- Introductions - consider using the participant "Preface" question as an icebreaker. [*What fictional universe, world, location, or culture would you most like to see become real?*]
- Small group time is participant focused, but if your groups aren't already being led by Connectors, this is the session to officially shift facilitation to them. This will further promote their role beyond the *Known* experience. Share with Connectors the reminder to encourage participants to tell stories, invite conversation, and model asking good follow-on questions.
 - Reminders and Tips:
 - If a participant is hesitant to share, don't force it. The group needs to be a safe space and some participants will be more comfortable listening than talking.
 - Encourage Connectors to share their stories, too.
 - Try out different group arrangements to determine which fits your particular participants best. Pair participants off, share stories as a whole group, divide by even or odd birthdays. Be creative and pay attention to the way the group responds to the various modes.

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Regroup

5 Minutes

Facilitator:

- Thank participants and Connectors for coming to *Known*
- Give announcements or reminders, specifically encouraging participants to complete their “The Story Continues” challenge to make a list of the various cultures they encounter during the week.
- Give a teaser for next session's topic: Essentials.
 - Teaser Script: *“Next time we meet we’ll be discussing Essentials. This is the time we get into the nuts and bolts of how our church operates (schedules, rhythms, times) and how you can become more engaged within the full life of the church. Remember to complete the Story Prompts in your Tell Your Story guide to help prepare for our small group storytelling and discussion.”*

Source: Leonard Sweet and Michael Adam Beck, *Contextual Intelligence: Unlocking the Ancient Secret to Mission on the Front Lines*. (Oviedo, FL: HigherLife Development Series, Inc., 2020).

Known Session Scripts

Session 7: Essentials

Pre-Session Prep

Using your answers from the Story Prompts and Session Builder, determine:

- What is the main story you want to tell?
- Whose stories will you include?
 - Reach out and gather the stories.
 - Pull out themes, specific quotes, and any full story you'd like to include.
- Who will tell this part of the story?
 - Invite the storyteller(s) to the session of *Known*.
 - Explain their role and the story you'd like them to tell.
 - Provide the highlights or any additional story details they're to include.
(Best practice is to share a draft of the transcript the storyteller will use at least 48 hours before the session to allow time to edit and align.)

Large Group

30 Minutes

Facilitator:

- Welcome participants to *Known*.
- Briefly introduce the main idea of Session 7: Essentials.
 - Intro Script: *"This week we're discussing the essentials within our church. It is important to us that you know and understand our 'why' and 'how' behind what we do, so we've focused on that for our first six sessions. But we know it is also essential that you're comfortable with the 'where, what, when, and who' of our church. Tonight will focus on those."*
 - Share a short story about your engagement in the church.
- Introduce this session's Storyteller.
 - Why are they the one(s) telling this session's story?

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

- What role do they play in the church/where are new members most likely to see them outside of *Known*?

Storyteller:

- Using the responses to the questions within Session 7 Story Prompts and Stakeholder Input Surveys, tell the story of the essentials within your church.
- Remember to highlight not just what is available at your church, but how new members can become a part of it, too. Also acknowledge the new members who have already taken the initiative to join groups, ministry, or service opportunities on their own and highlight their experiences within your stories.

Small Group

60 Minutes

Facilitator/Connector:

- Introductions - consider using the participant "Preface" question as an icebreaker. [*If you could add anything at the church, what would it be?*]
- Small group time is participant focused, but this session might be more hands-on than the others if you select to use this time to provide a "backstage" tour of facilities, help participants sign up for ministry or service opportunities, or other methods of actively sharing the "essentials" of your church. Because of this, story sharing and facilitation might resemble a paired off "walk-and-talk" style more than a full group discussion. Set the stage for this so participants know what to expect and group time is used well.
 - Reminders and Tips:
 - Some participants will already be engaged in groups, ministry, or service opportunities within the group. Acknowledge and celebrate that and, if appropriate, have them share their stories of how they became involved.

Regroup

5 Minutes

Facilitator:

- Thank participants and Connectors for coming to *Known*.

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

- Give announcements or reminders, specifically encouraging participants to complete their “The Story Continues” challenge to find out more about their specific areas of interest within the church.
- Give a teaser for next session's topic: Activate.
 - Teaser Script: *“Next time we meet will be our final session and we'll be discussing what it looks like to put everything we've learned during Known into practice. Remember to complete the Story Prompts in your Tell Your Story guide to help prepare for our small group storytelling and discussion.”*

Known Session Scripts

Session 8: Activate

Pre-Session Prep

The final session of *Known* is less about telling stories than it is about helping participants create the outline for their next story within the life of your church. Because of this, you may decide to forgo most of the large group time and instead focus almost entirely on creating space for the *Connectors* and participants to meet and make plans. The **Known Continues: Individual Action Plan** worksheet can help facilitate those conversations.

If there is someone within your church who has an inspiring story of how they bridged the gap between *Known* and becoming fully involved in the life of the church, consider highlighting their story briefly within the Large Group intro or inviting them to tell their story. If doing this, your pre-session prep will still need to include the following steps.

- Who will tell this part of the story?
 - Invite the storyteller(s) to the session of *Known*.
 - Explain their role and the story you'd like them to tell.

Large Group

10 Minutes

Facilitator/Storyteller:

- Welcome participants to *Known*.
- Briefly introduce the main idea of Session 8: Activate.
 - Intro Script: *"In our final session of Known the focus is you, the participant. It can be difficult to move from a highly structured environment like Known to being fully responsible for how and where you'll engage in the church next. Some of you have already become a*

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

part of a group or ministry or service effort outside of Known, and that is great! For the rest of us, this next step can easily become the one where our journey ends because we're not sure where to go next. That's what Known is for. We're dedicated to helping you move confidently into whatever comes next for you. Your connectors will remain focused on helping you navigate the church and where you can become involved, and your fellow participants will be walking this road with you, too."

- Share a short story about how you became involved in the church.

Small Group

80 Minutes

Facilitator/Connector:

- Introductions - consider using the participant "Preface" question as an icebreaker. [*What is your "secret skill?" What are you good at that people might not readily know?*]
- Small group time will be focused on sending the participants out with a plan for next steps and ensuring connectors and participants have a time set for their next touch point. Use this time to answer any logistical questions posed in previous sessions that you've been able to find the answers to, encourage the participants with positive things you've noticed about each of them, or anything else that wraps up loose ends. Use the **Known Continues: Individual Action Plan** worksheet to facilitate your conversations.

Regroup

5 Minutes

Facilitator:

- Thank participants and Connectors for being a part of *Known*.
- Consider sending participants out with an official blessing or benediction reminding them of their role within the church's mission and vision, based on your church cultures and values.

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Known Stakeholder Surveys

Known Stakeholder Surveys are designed to be distributed widely to current church members to help tell the most holistic story of the church and church members. The surveys allow more voices to be included in the discussions prompted by the *Tell Your Story: Session Script Builder* guide without requiring a church-wide meeting, unruly brainstorming session, or other logistically untenable methods for gathering church stories.

Seven branded *Known* Stakeholder Surveys are included below.

Known Stakeholder Survey

Session 1: History

To prepare for *Known*, our church is reaching out to various stakeholders within our church community to be able to tell the fullest story of our church. Could you help us tell the story of our history?

Please use the Story Prompts (questions) below to guide your response. You may answer them directly, with a story, or experience that highlights what you'd like new members to know about our church's history.

☐ I'd be willing to tell my story during/taped for a *Known* session

Story Prompts

What is the story of your church? Provide brief insight into the following:

History:

People (leaders and members):

Mission:

Vision:

Values:

Culture:

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Known Stakeholder Survey

Session 2: Mission

To prepare for *Known*, our church is reaching out to various stakeholders within our church community to be able to tell the fullest story of our church. Could you help us tell the story of our mission (what we're doing)?

Please use the Story Prompts (questions) below to guide your response. You may answer them directly, with a story, or experience that highlights what you'd like new members to know about our church's mission.

☐ I'd be willing to tell my story during/taped for a *Known* session

Story Prompts

What are you known for in the local community? How did this come to be? Has this always been your role or how you interact within a community? If not, what was it before? How did it evolve? How can new members be a part of this going forward?

What is the discipleship structure or process at your church? Tell a story about the impact of discipleship in the life of your church. How do new members get involved?

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Known⁺ Stakeholder Survey

Session 3: Vision

To prepare for *Known*, our church is reaching out to various stakeholders within our church community to be able to tell the fullest story of our church. Could you help us tell the story of our vision (where we're going)?

Please use the Story Prompts (questions) below to guide your response. You may answer them directly, with a story, or experience that highlights what you'd like new members to know about our church's vision.

☐ I'd be willing to tell my story during/taped for a *Known* session

Story Prompts

Where are you, as a church, going? What is your vision statement and how are you working to make it come to be? Tell a story about those efforts. What role will new members have in making the vision a reality?

Known⁺ Stakeholder Survey

Session 4: Values

To prepare for *Known*, our church is reaching out to various stakeholders within our church community to be able to tell the fullest story of our church. Could you help us tell the story of our values (how we do things)?

Please use the Story Prompts (questions) below to guide your response. You may answer them directly, with a story, or experience that highlights what you'd like new members to know about our church's values.

☐ I'd be willing to tell my story during/taped for a *Known* session

Story Prompts

What three words or phrases would you use to describe your church's values? How are these expressed? How did they come to be decided?

Change is inevitable, but we all have areas where we're more resistant or unwilling to change—and the same is true for your church. What are the areas you find that your church welcomes or encourages change? What are the areas where change might be seen as destabilizing or damaging? In other words, what are your church's non-negotiables when it comes to change? Conversely, where have you seen successful change happen before?

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Known Stakeholder Survey

Session 5: Community

To prepare for *Known*, our church is reaching out to various stakeholders within our church community to be able to tell the fullest story of our church. Could you help us tell the story of our community (who we are)?

Please use the Story Prompts (questions) below to guide your response. You may answer them directly, with a story, or experience that highlights what you'd like new members to know about our church's community.

☐ I'd be willing to tell my story during/taped for a *Known* session

Story Prompts

How would you describe your church community? How does community form? How can new members become integrated into the existing community?

Community influences culture. This will be expanded on in the next session, but looking specifically at the community elements, how are people celebrated and honored in your church? What does community look like at various life stages and ages?

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Known Stakeholder Survey

Session 6: Culture

To prepare for *Known*, our church is reaching out to various stakeholders within our church community to be able to tell the fullest story of our church. Could you help us tell the story of our culture (how we do things)?

Please use the Story Prompts (questions) below to guide your response. You may answer them directly, with a story, or experience that highlights what you'd like new members to know about our church's culture.

☐ I'd be willing to tell my story during/taped for a *Known* session

Story Prompts

How do those outside your church see you? What makes your church unique? What is the origin story of this quality? How is it reflective of your church community and culture? Has it shifted over time based on your church community and culture?

How do those inside your church experience it? How would you describe your church culture? What are three things about your church culture that would be helpful for a new member to know? What are the unwritten rules or expectations or codes of conduct?

How is trust shown at your church, especially between church leadership and church members? Tell a story that illustrates how trust is given or expressed and what you saw as a result.

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Known Stakeholder Survey

Session 7: Essentials

To prepare for *Known*, our church is reaching out to various stakeholders within our church community to be able to tell the fullest story of our church. Could you help us tell the story of our how members become involved?

Please use the Story Prompts (questions) below to guide your response. You may answer them directly, with a story, or experience that highlights what you'd like new members to know about our church's engagement opportunities.

☐ I'd be willing to tell my story during/taped for a *Known* session

Story Prompts

What are the rhythms of your church? When do groups or classes launch? When can ministries be joined?

How are needs, opportunities, or openings for feedback communicated? Where is the best place to go for information? What is the best method for sharing information?

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Known Resources and Templates

Most *Known* resources are session-driven, but there are several one-off resources that have been developed in response to stakeholder feedback. Additional resources will be created as part of my future development plan and in response to continued feedback.

The *Known Continues: Individual Action Plan* is designed for Connectors to use to facilitate one-on-one conversations with *Known* participants during the final session or following the completion of the *Known* experience. The action plan is broad and outlines next steps for both the participant and the Connector, reiterating the intention for Connectors to continue in their role beyond the official experience.

The *Known Reading Plan: 8 Weeks in The Story* is a scripture reading plan designed to use either in tandem with the *Known* experience or as a standalone resource. The broad questions are intended to continue the story-based focus of *Known* and further the overarching idea that our stories are part of God's story.

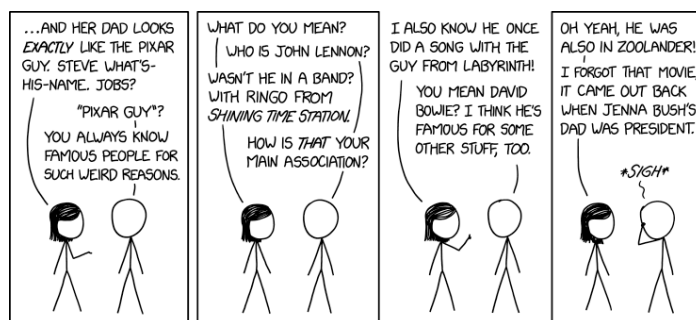
There are two *Known* templates each available in multiple versions: a 5X7 new member invitation postcard template available in one or two-sided options and a nametag template available in light or dark colorways.

Inviting new members is highlighted as the most important step of the Communication Plan in the Launch section of the Implementation Guide. The postcard template supports churches by providing the media resource and, hopefully, by jumpstarting creativity of what invitations can look like in each church context.

Having pre-filled name tags ready for the first session of *Known* was specifically suggested within the Format 101 Quick Guide. Beyond being functional, name tags communicate that participants are not just welcome but expected. They help set an overall culture of expectant hospitality and *Known* branded name tags specifically can help build a sense of community amongst experience participants. The templates are available in both light and dark colorways.

Known Continues

Individual Action Plan



XKCD Comics, Mainly Known For, <https://xkcd.com/2621/>

We can probably all relate to this cartoon because even in the church it can be easy to fall into the trap of being “the one who does kid’s ministry” or “the one who helps serve communion.” Because of this, *Known* intentionally placed this session at the end of the experience—once you’ve become known for who you are, not just your associations with other people or what you do. It is important, though, to make a plan for what your next step is in engaging in the church and explore how your *Connector* can help you do so.

Story Prompts

My next step is:

I’m interested in learning more about:

I’d like my *Connector* to help me:

Connector Contact Information:

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Known Reading Plan

8 Weeks in The Story

Jesus modeled the importance of sharing stories and holding the stories of others. This is a foundational discipleship practice we see throughout *The Story*.

(Note to Leaders:) This scripture reading plan is developed as a companion resource that can be used alongside *Known* or any other 8-week curriculum. Though there is not an official built-in time for discussion of the readings during *Known*, consider adding an icebreaker question related to the week's reading to each session's plan. You could also use the daily readings as an opportunity to touch base with participants throughout the week, reaching out with thoughts, reminders, or questions.

Week 1: History

Day 1: John 1:1-5
 Day 2: Genesis 15:4-6
 Day 3: Numbers 33
 Day 4: Matthew 1:1-17
 Day 5: Luke 2:52
 Day 6: Matthew 26:26-28

Daily Reflection Questions

1. How does this passage impact your view of the importance of knowing your history?
2. What did the Holy Spirit reveal to you in this passage?
3. What action will you take in response to the passage?

Week 2: Mission

Day 1: John 3:16-21
 Day 2: Matthew 28:16-20

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Day 3: Acts 1:6-14

Day 4: Matthew 9:35-10:8

Day 5: James 1:22-27

Day 6: Luke 10:25-37

Daily Reflection Questions

1. How does this passage impact your view of what it means to live a life on mission?
2. What did the Holy Spirit reveal to you in this passage?
3. What action will you take in response to the passage?

Week 3: Vision

Day 1: Isaiah 65:16-17

Day 2: Psalm 139:13-14

Day 3: 2 Corinthians 5:17

Day 4: James 1:17

Day 5: Exodus 14

Day 6: Numbers 13-14

Daily Reflection Questions

1. How does this passage impact your view of what it means to live a life with vision?
2. What did the Holy Spirit reveal to you in this passage?
3. What action will you take in response to the passage?

Week 4: Values

Day 1: Daniel 1

Day 2: Luke 6:17-38

Day 3: Hebrews 13:1-2; 6

Day 4: Hebrews 10:15-18

Day 5: Micah 6:8

Day 6: Daniel 3

Daily Reflection Questions

1. How does this passage impact your view of what it means to live a life aligned with your values?
2. What did the Holy Spirit reveal to you in this passage?

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

3. What action will you take in response to the passage?

Week 5: Community

Day 1: Hebrews 10:23-25

Day 2: Acts 2:42-47

Day 3: 1 John 3:11-18

Day 4: Colossians 3:11-17

Day 5: Ephesians 2:13-22

Day 6: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Daily Reflection Questions

1. How does this passage impact your view of what it means to live your life in community?
2. What did the Holy Spirit reveal to you in this passage?
3. What action will you take in response to the passage?

Week 6: Culture

Day 1: 1 Corinthians 13

Day 2: Matthew 7:1-5

Day 3: 1 John 4:7-19

Day 4: Psalm 126

Day 5: Jeremiah 29:1-7

Day 6: Jeremiah 29:13-14

Daily Reflection Questions

1. How does this passage impact your view of the importance of culture?
2. What did the Holy Spirit reveal to you in this passage?
3. What action will you take in response to the passage?

Week 7: Essentials

Day 1: Mark 12:29-34

Day 2: Acts 1:8

Day 3: John 3:16

Day 4: Micah 6:8

Day 5: James 2:1-13

Day 6: Romans 16

Story Based | Question Driven | Relationship Building

Daily Reflection Questions

1. How does this passage impact your understanding of the importance of being part of a church community?
2. What did the Holy Spirit reveal to you in this passage?
3. What action will you take in response to the passage?

Week 8: Activate

Day 1: Exodus 14:14-15

Day 2: James 2:14-24

Day 3: Numbers 20:2-12

Day 4: Luke 6:47-49

Day 5: Matthew 5:1-12

Day 6: Galatians 5:22-23

Daily Reflection Questions

1. How does this passage impact your understanding of engaging with your church community?
2. What did the Holy Spirit reveal to you in this passage?
3. What action will you take in response to the passage?



FIGURE 43: SINGLE-SIDED *KNOWN* POSTCARD TEMPLATE

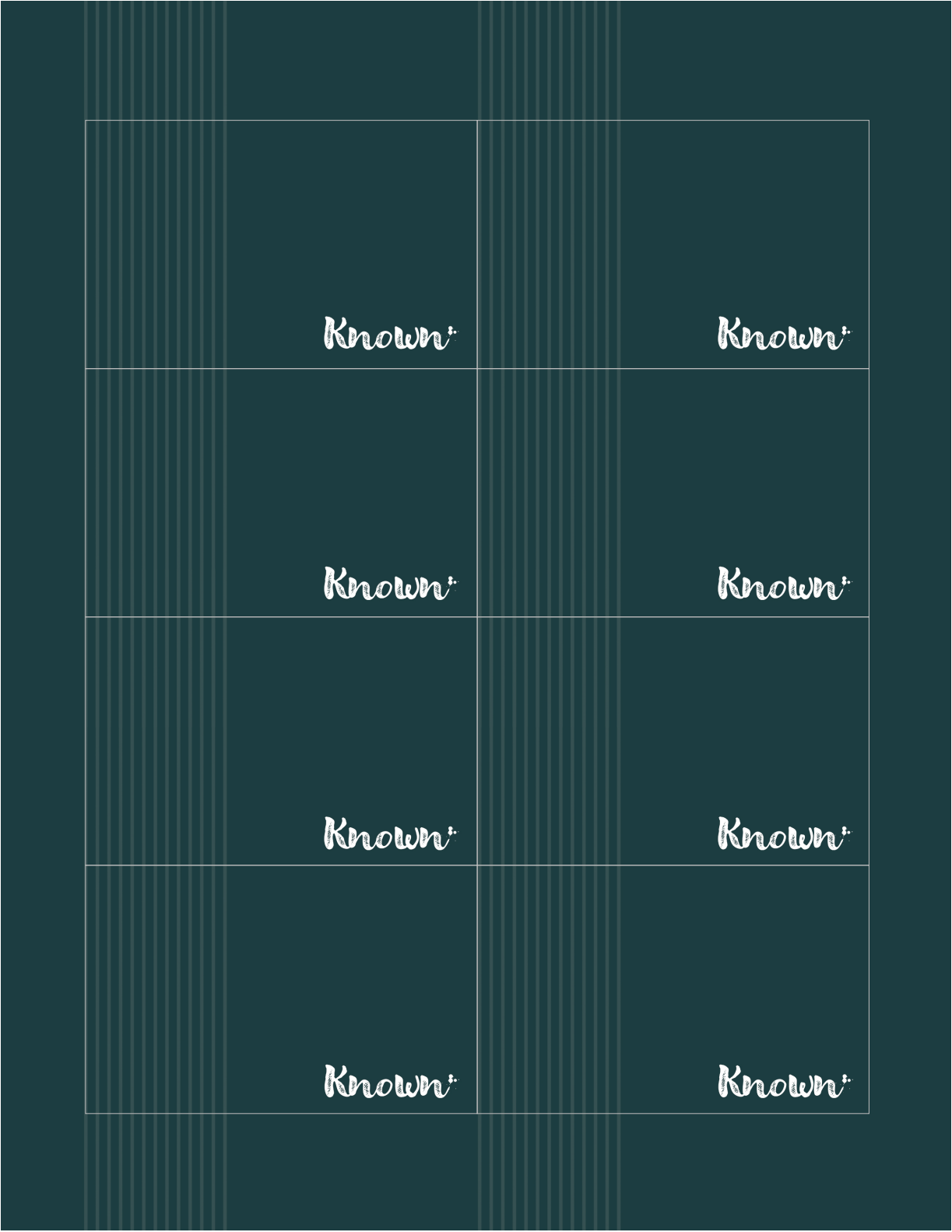


FIGURE 44: *KNOWN* NAME TAG TEMPLATE IN DARK COLORWAY

Known	Known
Known	Known
Known	Known
Known	Known

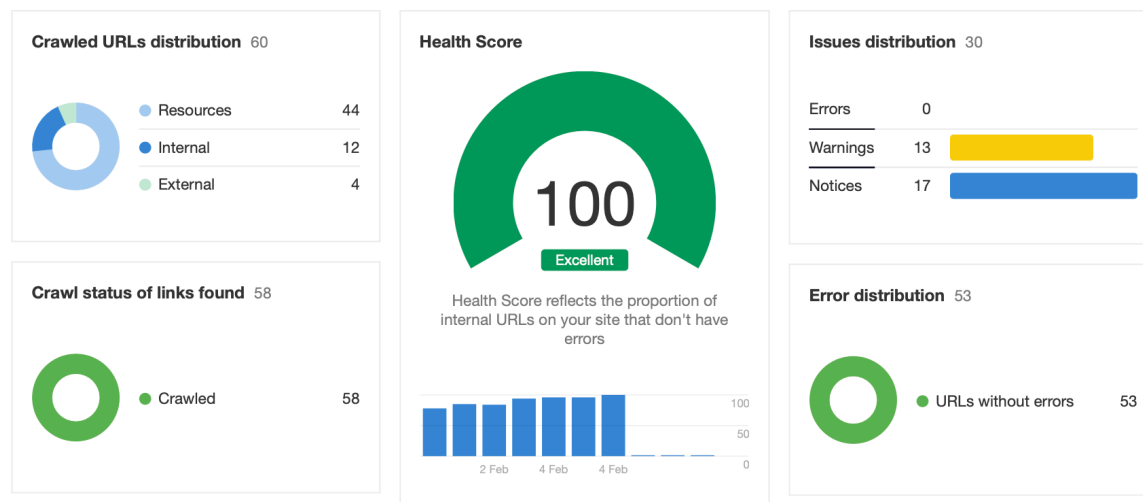
FIGURE 45: *KNOWN* NAME TAG TEMPLATE IN LIGHT COLORWAY

Quality Benchmark Report

My quality benchmark was measured by receiving an Ahrefs health score of 100% for the website. The report below shows that was achieved.

4 Feb 2023 Known (beknown.church/)

Overview [How to use](#)



**FIGURE 46: AHREFS HEALTH SCORE REPORT FOR
WWW.BEKNOWN.CHURCH**

Appendix F—Milestone 6 Project Launch Plan Documentation

Known Business and Marketing Plan One-Pager

MARKET PROBLEM: Churches focus on visitor hospitality and discipleship pipelines for engaged members, neglecting new members who are in a liminal period not provided for by either primary focus. Because of this, despite guided assimilation processes, new church members feel abandoned when moved immediately to self-directed engagement. This causes new members to leave or disengage and church leadership to be frustrated feeling like their efforts are fruitless.

- Secondary issue: Churches who aren't clear on their story fail to engage new members holistically, instead settling for sharing surface-level details (service times, ministry opportunities, kids programming), failing to explain their "why."

MY SOLUTION: Providing for new members' unique needs will improve their sense of belonging and commitment, which is mutually beneficial for both the members and the church. I'll address this initial market problem (biggest felt need) by offering the *Known* suite of resources free as top-of-the-funnel marketing for the staff development, training, and consulting services which will focus on the secondary issue which I believe to be the root of the problem.

- I will provide Calendly link on the website for those who wish to schedule meeting time.
- I will send targeted emails offering meeting times and reminding of provided services at 1 day, 1 week, 2 weeks, and 1 month intervals following sign up for free resources.

TARGET MARKET: Ministry and lay leaders of newly planted churches, churches catering to "deconstructing" and "reconstructing" members, and those comfortable with a question-based, curiosity-focused discipleship strategy, and most likely have Gen X, Millennial, or Gen Z leaders.

COMPETITORS: StoryBrand provides a similar service to businesses, but there is a gap in story-based church consulting. Similarly, churches turning to business practices and consultants who center business practices for the church are the primary competitors, but research shows the direct application of these best practices is detrimental for the church. If we don't want our members acting like consumers, we need to stop treating them like customers.

SALES AND MARKETING: Build brand awareness to become a go-to resource for church community building. Marketing will focus on expanding *Known*; consulting is a secondary focus.

- Create Social Media Presence
 - Develop supplemental training resources

MILESTONES

- Pilot *Known* in 1-3 Churches

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