



# Mortal, Do You See?

## Innovative Ministry as Place-based Vocational Discernment

## RIVERSIDE INNOVATION HUB

The Riverside Innovation Hub is a 5-year project designed to help faith communities innovate new connections with young adults at the intersections of their faith and their public lives. It is a collaborative effort sponsored by Augsburg University's Christensen Center for Vocation and supported by Lilly Endowment, Inc.

## RIVERSIDE INNOVATION HUB

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### *A Message For The Readers...*

FROM PROGRAM MANAGER KRISTINA FRUGÉ



The late poet Mary Oliver says, “Paying attention is the beginning of devotion.” Before reading those wise words of Mary’s, I observed this truth through the eyes of my son William. When he was four, he was obsessed with emergency vehicles and construction trucks. We had stacks of books he poured over, memorizing all the different names of these industrial vehicles and dozens of small toy replicas that would never be far out of reach. However, his favorite activity was to keep watch for these big trucks on the road, in real life. This turned every routine drive to preschool or the grocery store into a sightseeing adventure. It became just as exciting for me to spot a crane towering over a nearby construction site. Will’s delight became mine. Spotting one of these industrious vehicles sparked joy in Will, which sparked joy in me. I became so accustomed to being on the watch for oversized vehicles that I’d often feel the thrill of excitement at a passing fire truck, only to realize I was alone in the car.

Birds of prey became his next curiosity. We became experts at spotting the red tail hawks waiting patiently for a meal along the highway, eyeing a kettle of eagles swirling near the river, or glimpsing the cooper’s hawk that hung out near our park. More than just keeping our eyes peeled on our day to day routine, Will’s love of birds of prey became something we carved out time for. Trips to the raptor center, visits to the National Eagle Center, and making the late winter drive to Red Wing, MN where dozens of bald eagles could be seen congregating along the few open places of the Mississippi River.

Now a middle schooler, Will’s interests have moved on, but I still notice the fire trucks and the eagles. They remind me to pay attention. Actually, they remind me of how Will has taught me to pay attention - both along my daily routine and on the detours I make the time to take. As he has gotten older, the things he notices and needs me to notice now include both joys and sadness. The act of noticing remains the key to seeing both. And both need to be seen. Will has been to me like the companion in Ezekiel 47 who accompanies the prophet along the river flowing from the temple. He draws my attention to the world in the same way the companion’s inviting question to Ezekiel begs with him to notice what God is up to. “Mortal, do you see this?”

The stories and learnings collected through the Riverside Innovation Hub and shared on the following pages are offered to anyone curious about what this kind of “paying attention” work looks like when faith communities come together to learn in this way.

Just like Will helped me notice the dump trucks and red tail hawks along the way, this year has been filled with people and communities doing the work of helping each other to see. Nine young leaders on our RIH staff, eight of whom have been working with partner congregations as coaches, innovation teams from 25 congregations working and wondering together, and dozens of other conversation partners have been asking questions and practicing habits to help them pay closer attention. Together and in their neighborhoods, they have been digging deeper into the curiosities at the heart of a changing culture and an often bewildered church unsure how to respond.

This collection of people and communities have worked to cultivate habits that help us bring into focus the work of God's activity in the world and the stories it holds. We have been committed to efforts to see things differently, or perhaps more fully, so that we might discern how to show up most faithfully as church in these places and on these paths.

You will read about the framework we have shared to navigate our unique neighborhoods, contexts and the regular places we travel. The pages that follow illuminate this framework through sharing stories about accompanying neighbors and hearing their stories, interpreting those stories in light of our own faith community's stories and God's unfolding story, and discerning what new stories God might be calling us to participate in and proclaim together.

This report marks a milestone along our learning journey. The stories we have been paying attention to have sparked new curiosities. The things we have been learning are taking shape as our partner congregations are planning some new detours to take, off the beaten path in the next two years of our partnership. There will be more stories to share. However, right now we are pausing, reflecting and giving gratitude for what God has been up to in, with, and through our journey together this past year. We offer these learnings and stories as an invitation, a reminder and perhaps a source of encouragement for all those willing to take on the clumsy, slow and uncertain work of learning to pay attention.

*May we find ourselves in community with those who  
beg the constant question, "Mortal, do you see this?"*

*May our eyes be open to the places, people, and pains  
God is pleading with us to notice.*

*May our ears be eager to listen more fully, more faithfully,  
to God's invitation into another's story.*

*And may the things we see and hear stir us towards one  
another in love, without fear.*

God's Peace,



**Kristina Frugé**

Managing Director, Christensen Center for Vocation

**INNOVATIVE MINISTRY AS PLACE-  
BASED VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT**  
ISSUED JUNE 2019

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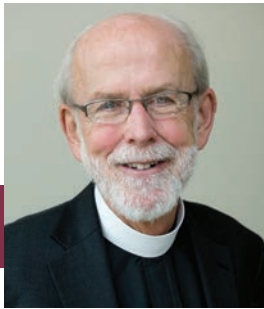
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*Front cover: the headwaters of the  
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*Back cover: the headwaters of the  
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*Opinions expressed in this  
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reflect official university policy.*



## A MESSAGE FROM THE REV. MARK S. HANSON

Dear Friends,

The enclosed overview of initial learnings from the ongoing work of the Riverside Innovation Hub deserves your thoughtful attention. That is true for you who belong to a faith community seeking to discern what it means to be freed in Christ to love and serve your neighbor in a rapidly changing, increasingly diverse, and often conflicted world. The report also speaks to those in an academic community committed to an action-reflection model of interdisciplinary and innovative learning. The learnings shared here call us to listen to and learn from young adults—their yearnings for more hospitable, generous, just, joyful, and loving communities of faith for the sake of the whole creation.

The work of the Riverside Innovation Hub is built upon the foundation of Augsburg University's ongoing commitment to the Lutheran intellectual tradition, particularly the conviction that God calls us, Christ frees us, and the Holy Spirit inspires and gifts us to be responsive with our neighbors as together we serve the common good. We believe faith frees us for innovation to be our vocation whether in a congregation, university, or neighborhood. As a Lutheran university, we seek to discern God's call in a spirit of humility, curiosity, courage, and hopeful anticipation.

The work outlined in the following pages is in progress. Augsburg University's commitment is to make available the resources of our academic community to congregations utilizing the Public Church Framework of accompaniment, interpretation, discernment, and proclamation. It is our conviction that, in this process of place-base, neighbor-centered vocational discernment, we are very much co-learners and co-creators with our partner faith communities.

On behalf of Augsburg University and the Christensen Center for Vocation, I extend heartfelt thanks to the Riverside Innovation Hub participating congregations, young adult coaches, to the Lilly Endowment for Religion, and to Augsburg faculty and staff engaged in this work. Together, we are discovering the power and possibilities when Spirit led innovation becomes our shared vocation.

God's Peace,

**Mark S. Hanson**

*Founding Director, Institute for Interfaith at Augsburg*

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# OUR TEAM

We are a team of eleven dynamic individuals. The Twin Cities, Iowa, South Dakota, California, Texas, Missouri, Montana, Argentina, Cambodia, China, Ethiopia, Germany, Norway, Philippines, Rwanda, and Vietnam—these are some of the places our nine young adult staff have lived and learned and led. We have been blessed to have a collection of experiences across the globe together at Augsburg these past ten months.



**Jeremy Myers, PhD**  
*RIH Faculty Lead*

*Pronouns: he, him, his*

“I have thoroughly enjoyed the collaborative nature of this project. We’ve benefited from the collective wisdom of numerous faculty members across various disciplines at Augsburg, from our eight amazing Innovation Coaches, and from the bold members of the Innovation Teams at our 25 partner congregations. These folks are bringing their pressing questions, deep faith, and high expectations to this work because they believe God is calling us into something very important right now.”



**Kristina Frugé**  
*RIH Program Manager*

*Pronouns: she, her, hers*

“A valuable lesson I’ve learned: Leaning into our curiosities is sacred and stressful work. It requires willingness to risk in spite of our fears and the humility to admit we still have something new to learn. And we aren’t meant to do this work alone.”



**Hà (Cassie) Đồng**  
*Communication Coordinator*

*Pronouns: she, her, hers*

“The most valuable aspect of this project is the infinite learning opportunities it provides. Given the messy and chaotic nature of any experiential learning project like this and my own insecurities/uncertainties, I’ve learned to allow my faith, passion, and curiosity to take the lead. Here is my favorite quote from Henri Matisse, an influential French painter, “Creativity takes courage.”



**Amanda Vetsch**  
*Innovation Coach*

*Pronouns: she, her, hers*

“One of my biggest growths this year has been to trust my leadership abilities. At the beginning of the year, I was anxious about coaching adults because most of my previous work had been with children and youth. It has been surprising to see how many things overlap, and the most exciting and effective is to encourage people to engage with curiosity and wonderment.”



**Asefa Melka Wakjira**  
*Innovation Coach*

*Pronouns: he, him, his*

“My biggest learning this year is that every church community is in need of more meaningful and authentic relationships among its member and neighbors because loneliness is a challenge that we are facing irrespective of generation.”



**Baird Linke**  
*Innovation Coach*

*Pronouns: he, him, his*

“ This project has shown me over and over again how important it is to pay attention in my faith. God shows up in unexpected ways and it’s important to stay open to that—especially when it’s not easy. It’s hard to balance paying attention to what’s going on in myself, others, and the world, but that’s the tension where I’ve seen God most often through this work. ”



**Emily Kindelspire**  
*Innovation Coach*

*Pronouns: she, her, hers*

“ The most meaningful aspect of my work with the Hub is to witness the desire of churches to imagine a new way of being together. Watching as they begin crossing the boundaries they had put up around themselves, following faithfully into the space where God is inviting them. ”



**Lindsay Boehmer**  
*Innovation Coach*

*Pronouns: she, her, hers*

“ The most meaningful part of this work for me has been the relationships. The relationships I have been invited into both within the congregations and in neighborhood communities, as well as the relationships I have witnessed growing between team members as they work together on this project and with neighborhood and community members as they spend time listening and sharing stories. ”



**Mason Mennenga**  
*Innovation Coach*

*Pronouns: he, him, his*

“ One of my churches surprised me with their growth: out of what they learned about their neighbor, it has not engendered a response to necessarily change their neighbor but to first change themselves. There are many ways this internal change may manifest for this church through this project; nonetheless, it is in actually listening to one’s neighbor that one may be disrupted enough to change one’s self. ”



**Michelé Crowder**  
*Innovation Coach*

*Pronouns: she, her, hers*

“ This project has challenged me to listen deeper to interactions with and between other people, observing how relationships matter at all levels of the human experience. It has called me to purposefully and intentionally choose to accompany others in the context that translates and matters to them with full transparency. ”



**Timothy Thao**  
*Innovation Coach*

*Pronouns: he, him, his*

“ For me, the most valuable aspect of our project is the blessing we’ve received as nine young adults to step into the church world and do meaningful work. To be called and entrusted with this work is incredibly humbling and is a tremendous honor. This shows the astounding intuition of our leaders and how they “get it” in their understanding of the impact that young people can and will have in the their communities both now and in the future. ”







# Project Overview

Why We Do What We Do  
Lilly Endowment's Young Adult Initiative  
Partnership Opportunities  
5-year Project Timeline  
Our Partners

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Riverside Innovation Hub is a five-year project working to cultivate curiosity at the intersection of faith communities, young adults, and the neighborhoods they are a part of. We are committed to being learning partners with faith communities and young adults as they engage in the challenging and exciting work of place-based vocational discernment in the public square for the common good. This is a collaborative effort sponsored by Augsburg University's Christensen Center for Vocation and supported by Lilly Endowment, Inc.

## Why We Do What We Do

1. Certain characteristics of today's young adults and our current culture make them less inclined to seek out a faith community, or any institution. However, young adults do seek meaningful community—that they increasingly report not seeking or not finding meaningful community in organized religious communities is worth paying attention to.
2. Faith communities express both curiosity and uncertainty about how to respond to a younger generation that is less interested and less engaged with organized religion than previous generations.
3. Our research shows that young adults do not like to be 'targeted.' We are fairly certain innovation, theologically understood, is not the creation of new, shiny programs intended to 'attract' young adults back to church.
4. We think innovation has more to do with faith communities stepping into vocational discernment in partnership with young adults and their neighborhood. This means getting out of comfort zones, moving into the neighborhood to actively listen to/respond to the neighbors' story, engaging young adults in this contextual learning work, and trusting that God has a new thing for us and our neighbor in this work.

Our Hub seeks to be a place of curiosity and learning. As we work with learning partners—congregations, young leaders, ministry staff, and many others—we convene collaborators, share ideas, generate insights, and wonder together how we respond faithfully to God's world in our unique corners of it.

## Lilly Endowment's Young Adult Initiative

We are one of 12 innovation hubs around the country in this initiative. These hubs vary in location, size, scale, context, staff structure, how they approach this initiative, and how they partner with congregations.

## Partnership Opportunities

There are 25 faith communities learning together about the ways our congregations and young adults are called to shape life-giving ministry and relationships in response to the neighborhood. These partners are working with the RIH along two different pathways.

Among these congregations are 16 faith communities who were accepted into a three-and-a-half year partnership of accompanying, interpreting, and discerning towards contextual life-giving proclamations of the gospel in relationship with young adults. This is a movement we call the Public Church Framework.

Year one was guided by a young adult Innovation Coach working closely with an Innovation Team from each congregation through the learning framework of the Public Church. Sub-grants are awarded over year two and three totaling \$25,000 – \$30,000 to support the innovative responses and experiments that have grown out of the unique learnings during year one.

An additional nine faith communities applied to partner with the RIH in a different way. They will not have grant funding but are committed to engaging in the learning coming out of this initiative, such as attending learning events, gathering as a smaller learning cohort, and exploring their compelling "why" for digging deeper in the curiosities at the center of the RIH.



**JUNE 2017 – JULY 2018**

**Research**

Our interdisciplinary research team studied 12 local faith communities currently doing effective ministry with young adults. We discovered 17 values and 4 characteristics that make these faith communities appealing to young adults.

**AUG. 2018 – AUG. 2019**

**Discerning**

Eight young adult innovation coaches led 16 congregations through a discernment process using the Public Church Framework to dream up a plan for two years of experimentation with new ministry approaches.

**SEP. 2019 – AUG. 2021**

**Adaptation**

Grant recipients begin implementing their new ideas and continue to learn in cohorts. RIH continues to provide support and facilitate learning opportunities throughout.

**SEP. 2021 – JULY 2022**

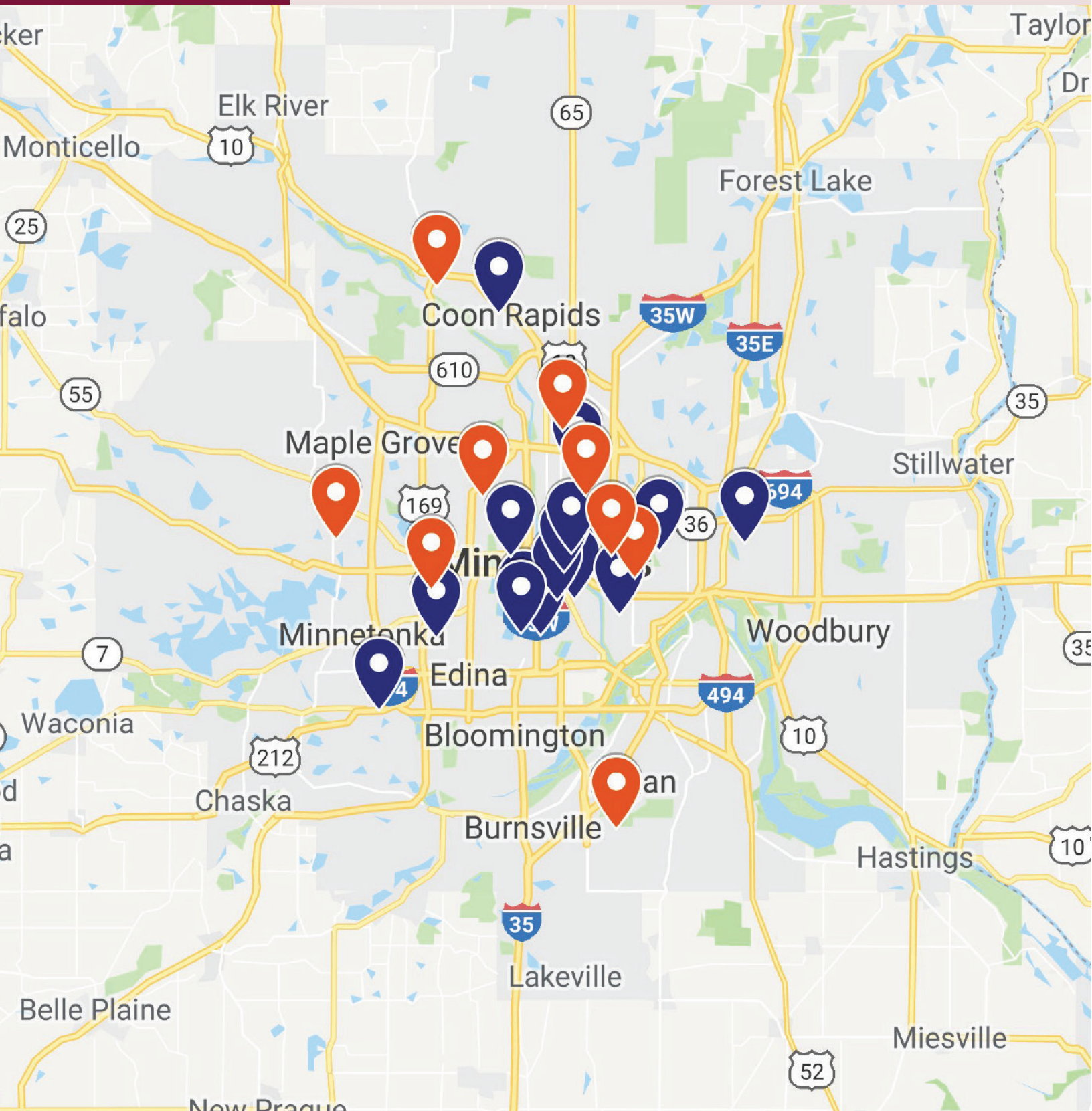
**Evaluation**

Our primary work during this phase will be reflection, assessment, and dissemination of the learning that happened throughout this project.



## OUR PARTNERS

The Riverside Innovation Hub has partnered with 25 congregations along two overlapping pathways. 16 congregations applied and were accepted in to a three-and-a-half year partnership with RIH which includes working this past year with an Innovation Coach towards experiments they will launch over the next two years supported by grant funding. Another nine congregations are participating in learning events and taking key insights and questions from the larger experiment in to their own contexts. They are learning at the periphery from the main cohort of congregations and contributing their voices and experiences to the shared learning of this project.



## Primary Cohort of Partner Congregations

### **BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Minneapolis, MN

### **BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Minneapolis, MN

### **CHURCH OF ALL NATIONS**

Columbia Heights, MN

### **FABRIC**

Minneapolis, MN

### **FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Coon Rapids, MN

### **HOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN**

Minneapolis, MN

### **NEW CITY CHURCH**

Minneapolis, MN

### **OUR REDEEMER LUTHERAN CHURCH**

St. Paul, MN

### **PILGRIM LUTHERAN CHURCH**

St. Paul, MN

### **REDEEMER LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Minneapolis, MN

### **SHEPHERD OF THE HILLS LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Hopkins, MN

### **ST. ANDREW LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Eden Prairie, MN

### **ST. LUKE'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

Minneapolis, MN

### **ST. TIMOTHY LUTHERAN CHURCH**

St. Paul, MN

### **TRINITY LUTHERAN CONGREGATION**

Minneapolis, MN

### **UNIVERSITY LUTHERAN CHURCH OF HOPE**

Minneapolis, MN

## Periphery Cohort of Partner Congregations

### **ELIM LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Robbinsdale, MN

### **HAMLIN UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

St. Paul, MN

### **INTERTWINE NORTHEAST**

St. Anthony, MN

### **NEW SALEM MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH**

Minneapolis, MN

### **SHEPHERD OF THE VALLEY LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Apple Valley, MN

### **ST. MATTHEW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

St. Paul, MN

### **ST. PHILIP'S LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Fridley, MN

### **ST. PHILIP THE DEACON LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Plymouth, MN

### **WESTWOOD LUTHERAN CHURCH**

St. Louis Park, MN

### **ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Anoka, MN







# Our Learning

2018 Research Infographic  
2018 Research Key Findings  
Key Learnings

# OUR RESEARCH

Prior to launching our innovation work, we spent one year learning from local faith communities who are effectively engaging young adults in meaningful ways. From September 2017 – May 2018, we conducted site visits, interviews, and focus groups in various congregations with an interdisciplinary team of researchers from Augsburg University. Here is a summary of what we found. It is important to note that not all values were present in all congregations and were stronger in some than in others.



9 RESEARCHERS  
— FROM —  
8 DISCIPLINES

12



FAITH COMMUNITIES

54

INTERVIEW  
HOURS

17

VALUES

— CATEGORIZED INTO —

4

CHARACTERISTICS

PLACESHARER

COMMUNITY



ROOTED IN  
THEOLOGY

PUBLIC

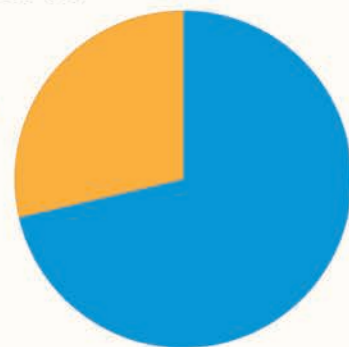
84

PEOPLE

INTERVIEWED

24

CHURCH  
LEADERS  
& STAFF



60

YOUNG  
ADULTS

23 – 29 YEARS OLD

“ Young adults are seeking vulnerable and authentic communities that are explicit and intentional about living out their values and beliefs in the public square for the common good. ”

## PLACESHARER

These faith communities effectively enter into relationships with young adults by engaging in the real joys and struggles of their lives. They are not afraid of tough conversations or hard questions. They allow people to bring their real selves to the table.

**Authenticity:** People are allowed and encouraged to be their true selves.

**Vulnerability:** The community is not afraid to share their whole lives.

**Complexity:** There is eagerness to engage difficult issues and difficult conversations.

**Energy:** There is a noticeable quality of connection that matches where the young adults find themselves.



## ROOTED IN THEOLOGY

These faith communities are clear about their beliefs and practices. Their theological convictions shape their lives together. Their sense of mission is clear and compelling and is reflected in what they do.

**Explicit:** The faith community knows what they stand for and are explicit about making it known.

**Value Alignment:** The faith community's values and priorities align with those of young adults.

**Practical Wisdom:** They think theologically about the world and think worldly about their theology.

**Good News/Bad News:** An awareness of how young adults suffer and an effort to engage with hope.



## COMMUNITY

These faith communities intentionally build community and bring young adults into that community. There is a palpable sense of belonging and support, and young adults are instrumental leaders within the community.

**Social Networks:** Young adults find their way into these faith communities through their social networks.

**Participatory:** Young adults are valued resources, active in the life and leadership of the faith community.

**Relationships:** Meaningful relationships with peers and across generations are intentionally nurtured.

**Leadership:** The leaders are seen as gifted preachers, teachers, & caregivers.



**Belonging:** There is a sense of solidarity and “we-ness” across the faith community.



## PUBLIC

These faith communities empower people to actively live out their faith in public life in a variety of ways. There is a high value placed upon the community gathered for worship but always with an eye and ear towards those beyond their faith community.

**Vocation:** Young adults have the opportunity to discern how their faith frees them for action in the world.

**Inward/Outward:** The needs of the gathered community are met while remaining open to those beyond.

**Context:** The location of the faith community is an important factor in the faith community's identity.

**Social Justice:** Social justice is lifted up as an important component of the life of faith.

# KEY LEARNINGS

As an institution, we desire to be a faithful learning partner with congregations and young leaders beyond the timeframe of this particular Lilly grant. The following lessons from this past year guide our ongoing RIH work and will be formative in shaping our future work through Augsburg's Christensen Center for Vocation.

# 1

## **YOUNG ADULTS ARE SEEKING COMMUNITY AND AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS.**

They do not need religious communities to help them find, create, and steward these things. However, they are not inherently pessimistic about religious communities, so if congregations can be humble, curious and public, young adults might find a relationship with a congregation's expression of community meaningful and worthwhile.

# 2

## **INVESTING IN YOUNG LEADERS IS WORTH THE RESOURCES OF TIME, FUNDS, ENERGY, AND CHALLENGE.**

Investing in young leaders of color, young leaders who may not necessarily identify as Christians, and young LGBTQ+ leaders is likewise of the highest priorities. This will include tending to and acknowledging potential trauma and pain young leaders who have been marginalized may have experienced, often at the hands of the church. The church must embrace a humble posture to enter into this kind of work.

# 3

## **SHARING POWER WITH YOUNG LEADERS MEANS: SHARING EXISTING ROLES, ALLOWING SPACE FOR NEW ROLES/IDEAS TO TAKE HOLD, AND IDENTIFYING, ACCOMPANYING AND RALLYING BEHIND YOUNG LEADERS OUTSIDE THE CONGREGATION.**

All of these ways to share power, require existing leaders and/or those with power to be humble and expect they have something new to learn. It also requires a closer look at barriers that likely exist to sharing power. For example, take note of policies, processes, habits, cultural norms that work for those of us used to the church scene but will be barriers to those who are not.

# 4

## **THIS WORK IS SLOW.**

The conduit for this kind of work at its core is relationships - relationships with young adults, with neighbors, with leaders inside and outside the congregation. Authentic relationships necessitate a certain amount of risk taking - namely the risk that encountering another could change us. Even when we are up for the risk, the work takes time. As one of our congregational team leaders said, "It moves at the speed of trust."

# 5

## **CHRISTIANS HAVE CO-OPTED THE IDENTIFIER OF "FAITH."**

There are many young adults living lives of faith without the label of "Christian" and outside the boundaries of any church. They are looking to and living into lives of meaning. They are not lost. They are not looking for the church to save them. If anything, they are looking for others trying to live lives of meaning in a complex context. Churches could be a part of that but, again, need to acknowledge that they have something new to learn, and to confess.



# 6

## IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNPACK THE “WHY” OF A CONGREGATION MOTIVATING ITS DESIRE TO ENGAGE YOUNG ADULTS.

We have encountered three basic “whys” functioning in congregations. **One is anxiety.** With fewer people and/or young people involved in our churches, anxiety over the survival of one’s congregation can become the primary motivator.

**Another “why” is ego or success.** For churches who are overriding the wave of decline many congregations are experiencing, they see themselves as the kinds of churches who should be able to “solve the problem” of young adults retreating from religious communities. Neither are helpful reasons in the long run, because the focus is ultimately internal.

**The third “why” is curiosity.** This is where congregations can sincerely ask and wrestle with the question, “What is God up to in this cultural shift?” The why of curiosity is not solving the problem of young adults or saving a dying church, but a focus on God’s activity in the world. This “why” engages congregations seeking to be faithful in their ever-changing contexts. From a place of curiosity, congregations can find courage to risk despite their anxiety. From a place of curiosity, congregations can embrace the humility needed to be open to the new things God may need them to learn.

Riverside Innovation Hub Staff. Photo credit: Linh Dao







# Innovation as Vocation

Public Church  
Accompaniment  
Interpretation  
Discernment  
Proclamation

# PUBLIC CHURCH

The Public Church Framework is a *people-focused* approach to Christian formation and discipleship that begins with a movement out into the public square rather than beginning in church doctrine. It is a method for doing that work. It is descriptive rather than prescriptive in that it describes a natural rhythm or method we undertake when aiming to clarify “what gospel must mean here and now” for our communities.

## Why Must We Become Public?

The Christian community’s call is to proclaim good news into our neighbors’ bad news. We believe the good news is always Jesus Christ, but we also believe this good news of Jesus Christ will look and sound differently depending upon how

individuals and neighborhoods are experiencing bad news. Young people, actually all people, will be drawn to a faith community actively engaged in proclaiming good news and challenging the particular bad news in its neighborhood.

## How Do We Become Public?



# ACCOMPANIMENT

## Accompaniment Facts

Time spent per artform

**Months**

**4**

Value

### Theological Values

Our relational God calls us into and frees us for relationships with our neighbors.

God is already at work healing our world.

### Practical Values

Build new connections and relationships in the local community

Learn to see God at work in the world.

Learn how your faith community can partner with the neighborhood.

Discover the joys and sorrows of those who live and work near your faith community.

Develop a habit of listening deeply to the stories of your neighbors.

**Descriptive Words:** into, listen, outward, alongside of, reorientation, relationship, paying attention, love your neighbors, walking with, befriend, receptivity

## What is accompaniment?

Accompaniment is the first artform, or movement, of the Public Church Framework. It describes a faith community's movement out into its neighborhood or context. It assumes a desire to know the neighbor, and their story, in their own words. The neighbor includes people, institutions, systems, watersheds, groves of trees, herds of cattle, and all other creatures around us. Accompaniment is the work we do to truly know our neighbor.

## Why is accompaniment so important?

Accompaniment grows from our faith in a God who accompanies creation. God is continually creating a world of relationships where humans, other creatures, vegetation, water, and climate accompany and provide for one another—for better or worse. God's creative word that brings about this creation becomes incarnate in Jesus Christ who is God's word accompanying us. God's spirit continues to free us and empower us to be in accompaniment with one another. Therefore, accompaniment becomes the way in which we live out God's mission in our world and specifically in our neighborhoods.



Young adults from various backgrounds were invited to present at the RIH Learning Event to discuss about meaning making and how a faith community does or does not play a role in that.

Photo credit: Amanda Vetsch

*Accompaniment tells us that we should not make any assumption about any age group or neighbor but rather value them. That's why I'm convinced that the Public Church Framework should not be about young adult ministry alone. Every church should consider applying it to all areas of ministry.*

— Asefa Wakjira, Innovation Coach



## How do you begin to practice accompaniment?

There are endless ways to practice accompaniment, and the Public Church Framework resists prescribing best practices. It is the work of God's people to learn to practice accompaniment in ways that match their context, their neighbors' needs, and their own assets.

Rather than best practices, we offer you some “best questions”. These are the questions you should be able to answer through your practice of accompaniment. What would be the best ways your faith community could find the answers to these questions in your context?

### Best Questions

1. What is our neighborhood or parish (geographical location)?
2. Where are our listening posts - the places in your neighborhood where people gather to share their stories?
3. What are the places and spaces in our context we are in relationship with and have a history with?
4. What are the places and spaces in our neighborhood we are curious to learn more about?
5. Who are the neighborhood historians—people who know the history of this place?
6. Who is our neighbor? What are the demographics of our neighborhood (race, socioeconomic, single family/rental units, age)? How do these compare to the demographics of our faith community?
7. How are our neighbors experiencing hope and joy?
8. How are our neighbors experiencing anxiety, fear and heartache?
9. What are our neighbors' hopes, dreams and desires for our shared neighborhood?
10. Who cares about the things and people our faith community care about?



## How did congregations approach this movement?

Teams came up with various ways to move out into the neighborhood and listen to their neighbors' stories. For some, this included doing one-on-ones, attending local neighborhood events and activities, or reframing existing activities of the church to make it a listening post. One team has been helping a man on Friday nights once a month who gives out pizza and Somali tea on the corner of downtown Minneapolis in an effort to keep people from overdosing on drugs in an area that has had high rates of this.

Young adults shared stories at Mark Yaconelli's Storytelling Workshop.  
Photo credit: Linh Dao

“

*“I think the team “accompanied” our neighborhood in a diverse amount of ways! From one-to-ones to reading [University of Minnesota] newspaper articles, going to neighborhood meetings and getting to know the neighborhood better while on our feet.”*

*— Innovation Team, University Lutheran Church of Hope*

”

## Examples of listening posts chosen by Innovation Teams

Soup lunches, street corners, local schools, neighborhood businesses, parking lots, local bars, walks through the neighborhood, open mic nights, bike shops, libraries, rivers and parks, neighborhood gardens, etc.—these have all been places team members and coaches have engaged with in new ways and with a new set of intentions.

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### **Location: Parking Lot**

#### **Characteristics:**

- Used by surrounding business and a local school
- One block away from church building

#### **Relationship Status:**

- Belongs to the church but is used by surrounding businesses
- Off the radar for most members who don't realize it belongs to the church

#### **Curiosity/Hope:**

- Who parks in the lot? How can we get to know the people who use the parking lot? Do they live in the neighborhood or drive from other places?
- 



### **Location: Centro de trabajadores unidos en la lucha (CTUL)**

#### **Characteristics:**

- Engaged in worker's rights advocacy in South Minneapolis
- Relationships with low-income Latinx households and families

#### **Relationship Status:**

- Solidarity partner

#### **Curiosity/Hope:**

- How could we join efforts for anti-gentrification work and develop relationships with individuals affected by wage theft and gentrification?
- 



### **Location: Community Bread Oven**

#### **Characteristics:**

- Located in the church's parking lot
- Hosts free bread and pizza baking events attended by local students

#### **Relationship Status:**

- Church members are familiar with this place

#### **Curiosity/Hope:**

- How could this space foster meaningful relationship building, mutual conversation and active listening opportunities?
-

# highlight

## Accompaniment at Faith Lutheran Church: A Spiritual Experience of Listening to Neighbors

Written by Timothy Thao, Innovation Coach

*The following story is written by Timothy Thao, one of our Innovation Coaches. Tim shares about the accompaniment story of the young adult Innovation Team at Faith Lutheran Church and their initial learning as they have been having more intentional conversations with their local neighbors in Coon Rapids, MN.*

The accompaniment phase has been incredibly fruitful for the shared community of Coon Rapids. Even now, collaboration is bubbling up among the different churches and even between churches and other organizations.

Our Innovation Team at Faith Lutheran has accomplished some incredible feats in the early phase of this project. So many connections have been established and with all the right people coming in at the right place and at the right time, it has been putting us in a prime position to do a powerful work in our shared community.

One of our team members met with the superintendent of the local school district, David Law. Their conversation reflected much of what we heard from other sources in our community: the youth are generally underserved in the area, high school students need additional space for extra-curricular activities, there is a growing number of transient students, and numerous other issues. The superintendent also mentioned how, seemingly, very few of the various churches that line both sides of Hanson Boulevard have reached out to support the schools. He recalled that many congregations out in the White Bear

Lake area, for example, are big supporters of the local schools. It was surprising for him to see the stark contrast between Coon Rapids and White Bear Lake, despite their similar demographics.

As a result, David Law is hoping to gather local pastors on a regular basis to establish more support for students and staff in the Anoka-Hennepin school district. He is hoping to meet quarterly and is looking to begin connecting more with the senior pastor at Faith Lutheran.

A meeting with the Community Outreach Specialist from the Coon Rapids Police Department also gave us much insight into the culture of our city. Trish Heitman spoke on the exponential increase of incoming calls in regards to mental health and the effect that this has had on the area. We later learned that the conservative tone of the large suburb is having a deep and dramatic impact on the youth of the city and leaders in the city are struggling to deal with it well. In light of this conservative tone, the growing population of ethnic minorities and immigrants in the community are met with great fear. This was paralleled with a meeting that two members of our team had with Deb Geiger, the current librarian at Coon Rapids High School. She attested to the tensions that are growing in the community. This opens up a potential avenue for future engagement with our innovation initiative.

We met also with Lori Anderson who runs a program called Transformative Circle. She began the work a number of years ago as she observed

the climate and demographic of Coon Rapids shifting. So on the first Thursday of every month, Lori gathers various people from the area around the dinner table to engage on a series of topics. Her Transformative Circle dinners create a culture of inclusivity and unity in the midst of hostility and division. Here, the stories of various community members coalesce and give birth to a shared community, much like that which we so long to see. One of our team members is scheduled to lead January's circle, and we are excited to see this partnership come out of our accompaniment.

God is, without a doubt, moving in great ways, and we are so humbled to be a part of this mighty work.

*Faith's young adult group during a summer mission trip.  
Photo credit: Faith Lutheran Church*





## THE CHALLENGES OF LISTENING TO THE NEIGHBORS' STORY

### *FAQ about accompaniment*

We believe the movement towards the neighbor and neighborhood brings us closer to God's work unfolding in the world, or our corner of it. If we as Christian communities desire to be faithful partners in God's work, then we must follow God into the world. More often than not, the places God shows up are not easy places to be. They are also places of risk, because if God is there, change is likely to happen. And some of that change might even get on us. Brokenness, death, heartache, desolation—these are the lonely places God occupies. Wherever there is bad news, God will be working to enter in and disarm it with good news, with hope, with relationships.



*Why do we begin with the neighbor?*

Pursuing pathways of inquiry into the neighborhood invites us to encounter God *in* and *with* our neighbor. These are the first steps of vocational discernment. These pathways lead us towards a deeper understanding of how God frees God's people to show up in particular places and work for and with the neighbor—in all its forms—to proclaim good news and hope. The life-giving and uncomfortable call extended to churches and people of faith in neighborhoods near and far is the call to be neighbor.

*"As the church, we sometimes think that we have the market-cornered on community, but that is a myth... I think we have a mindset that we have what our neighbors need, and this is simply not true. How do we exist for the sake of communities other than our own, while maintaining those elements of our own community that we find life-giving? What elements of our community need to die in order to exist for the sake of the neighbor? Are we willing to part with those elements? All that to say, God is active all over the place, building relationships, raising up communities, bringing forth a sense of justice."*

*— Innovation Team, University Lutheran Church of Hope*

*Why do we need to identify a geographical neighborhood?*

The neighborhoods our congregations are a part of present a particular place to learn how to wrestle with God's particular work in real time, with real people. Our hope is through this unique contextual learning experience, faith communities will be equipped to continue using the Public Church Framework as an approach to connect and build meaningful relationships with not only their local neighbors but also other people, including young adults, and other communities.

*"If I am going to continue being a part of the community at St. Luke's then I should be more concerned with developing relationships with those around the church."*

*— Innovation Team, St. Luke's Episcopal Church*



Should we try to listen to our congregational members first before moving out into an unfamiliar neighborhood?

Getting to know your faith community members is an important, ongoing effort. The listening skills needed for accompaniment will benefit relationships inside and outside your faith community. Some Innovation Team members found that talking to someone outside of their faith community was a creative way to explore the community's core values, beliefs, and mission and to gain understanding of its impact on the local neighborhood. Furthermore, when you practice interpretation (the second artform), you will have the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of your own faith community.

*"We are getting a much better sense of who we are as a congregation. Who we really are, not just who we imagine ourselves to be. I think this has been one of the successes of this process."*

— Innovation Team, University Lutheran Church of Hope

It often feels uncomfortable to talk to strangers. Is this necessary? How can we start?

If faith communities want to participate in the proclamation of good news relevant to people's lives, then we first have to do the hard work of listening to our neighbors' stories. Accompaniment takes seriously the location in which our faith communities are planted and challenges us to do the intentional work of getting to know these places and those who call these places home. Accompaniment is a way for us to uncover the work God is already doing in our neighborhoods.

*"...the challenge was how to ask questions when we come across strangers. We may make people uncomfortable... Out of this discussion we came up with icebreaker questions that we can use for starting conversation... Again, the challenge we are going through in the accompaniment process is clear affirmation for necessity of the project we are doing."*

— Innovation Team, Bethlehem Lutheran Church

*"The most exciting aspect of accompanying our neighbor is the opportunity for a spiritual experience — every time.... We are putting our need for certainty aside and allowing God to enter us as peaceful listener."*

— Innovation Team, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church

Don't expect people to come to you, reach out to them. When we accompany our neighbors, we listen to them and talk with them. We become the receivers of their stories of desolation and consolation.

*"Waiting for email responses? It doesn't work in this neighborhood! We need to keep showing up places and using our resources and established connections to show up. They are happy to talk to us, but we've got to find them first!"*

— Innovation Team, Trinity Lutheran Congregation

*"... community listening is best done with a combination of process (individual listening that broadens options) and event (one particular place and time that spurs decisiveness)."*

— Innovation Team, New City Church

## What's Next?

If you and your faith community are eager to begin practicing this artform of accompaniment, then consider some of these exercises.

1. Define your faith community's "neighborhood". We use that term to simply mean the context in which your congregation is planted. It may or may not be a neighborhood in the traditional sense.
2. Make use of online programs that allow you to create a report of the demographics in your faith community's surrounding area such as MissionInsite.com or the Community Profile Builder at TheARDA.com.
3. Begin attending neighborhood meetings, school board meetings, or other gatherings that are important to the life and function of your faith community's neighborhood.
4. Learn how to make the most out of one-to-one meetings and start scheduling one-to-ones with those who live and are active in your faith community's neighborhood.
5. Identify the listening posts and historians in your faith community's neighborhood. Listening posts are places in the neighborhood where people gather. Historians are those who know the stories of the neighborhood. Start spending time in these listening posts and with these historians.
6. Walk the neighborhood looking to notice where there is life and energy throughout the neighborhood that maybe you never noticed before.
7. Most importantly, just get out there and start meeting people and listening to their stories, hopes, and dreams.



# INTERPRETATION

## Interpretation Facts

Time spent per artform

**Months**

**2**

### Theological Values

### Value

God reveals Godself to us through scripture. We see this more clearly when scripture is put into conversation with our daily lives.

God reveals Godself to us in daily life. We see this more clearly when our daily lives are put into conversation with scripture.

God reveals Godself to us in our neighbor. We see this more clearly when our neighbor's story is placed into conversation with our story and scripture.

### Practical Values

Learn to express who we are, what we believe, and the world we believe God envisions for us.

Help faith communities reflect on their identity, history, mission, hopes, and dreams.

Help faith communities learn to see the world in light of God's stories and promises.

Learn about the values of doing reflection and develop a habit of doing so.

**Descriptive Words:** within, reflect, inward, weaving stories, unpacking history, self-understanding, meaning-making, love yourself, thinking theologically, self-awareness, trans-contextual thinking

## What is interpretation?

Interpretation happens as we move from hearing our neighbors' stories back into the stories of our particular faith communities. There are three strands, or narratives, that we weave together using the artform of interpretation. We weave together the *neighbors' stories* we've heard in our accompaniment, *our own stories* as a faith community, and what we believe to be *God's story*. These three strands should enlighten one another as well as push back against and challenge one another to form both our communities of faith and our work in our neighborhoods.

## Why is interpretation so important?

People want to know how faith impacts their daily lives. It is the role of the faith community to help their people learn to see the world in light of God's promises. We also want our collective actions to clearly express the essence of who we are, what we believe, and the world we believe God envisions for us. Theology matters, and this theological turn in our work needs to be intentional. Interpretation is what makes the Public Church Framework different from other approaches to this kind of work.

*For the commissioning at the RIH June 1<sup>st</sup> event, Innovation Coaches prepared handmade gifts for our partner congregations. Each gift contains water from the headwaters of the Mississippi River, a plant, and a fruit to represent the vision from Ezekiel 47:1–12, which guided the Public Church Framework.*

*Photo credit: Ha (Cassie) Dong*



## How do you begin to practice interpretation?

Rather than best practices, we offer you some “best questions.” These are the questions you should be able to answer through your practice of interpretation. What would be the best ways your faith community could find the answers to these questions in your context? How you chase after the answers to these questions is up to you, but we recommend involving as many other people from your faith community as possible. The more perspectives you get, the richer the dialogue will become.

### Best Questions

1. What are the core theological convictions of our faith community?
2. What are the key components (stories, metaphors, etc.) of the biblical narrative that shape our life together as a faith community?
3. What are the significant events in your faith community’s history that have shaped your identity?
4. How do these theological convictions, components of the biblical narrative, and events from your past influence the way you hear and understand the stories you encountered in your accompaniment experiences?
5. How do the stories you encountered in accompaniment push back against, challenge, or affirm your core theological convictions and beliefs?

## How did congregations approach this movement?

Some congregations hosted storytelling timeline activities to generate their own story with members from the larger congregation. One coach led a Sunday gathering of people through creating action statements based on what they believe to be true about God, their faith community, and the neighborhood. One congregation, who has a weekly soup meal ministry, hosted a Sunday soup meal and invited their Sunday members and their weekday community (who do not overlap much). They shared a meal together and were led through storytelling exercises by the Innovation Coach, wondering what happens when we gather at a table together in this community. We also heard one pastor help weave these stories together in a sermon in his particular context.



#### **OUR COMMENT:**

*We noticed that many congregations struggled with this artform of interpretation. There were issues with not having enough time to do this hard work or simply not understanding how to weave together the stories of neighbor, God, and the faith community. A challenge for ourselves at the Riverside Innovation Hub will be to identify and construct more helpful ways to coach congregations through this particular artform because we believe the interpretive/theological turn is critical to this process of becoming a public church.*

*— Jeremy Myers, RIH Faculty Lead*



# highlight

## The Treasure(r) of Sticky Notes

Written by Lindsay Boehmer, Innovation Coach

*The following story was written by Lindsay Boehmer, one of our Innovation Coaches. She shares about her experiences with her congregational teams as they did the messy, surprising and creative work of interpretation—working to weave together their neighbor's story, God's story and their own story.*

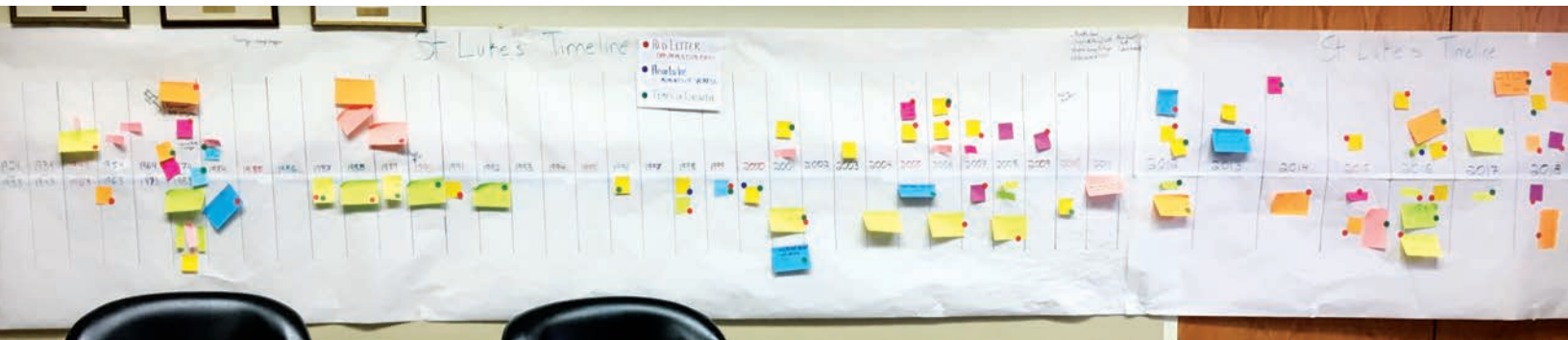
I love sticky notes! The first day I met the RIH staff, I was forced to reveal this bit of information about myself through a get-to-know-you question. Just the other day, I earned a new title from Isra—a middle schooler who attends Trinity Lutheran Congregation's Homework Help Program—when she saw the piles of sticky notes I was documenting from a team activity earlier in the week: “What are you!? The treasurer of sticky notes!?” Well, yes, actually. I use sticky notes for many activities in my life, and this job has been no exception.

The first time I introduced sticky notes to my Innovation Teams was to brainstorm and collect our learnings from our accompaniment

work in the neighborhood. Teams reflected on questions such as “what are our neighbor's hopes, dreams, and desires for our shared neighborhood?” and “how are our neighbors experiencing anxiety, fear and heartache?” When it felt like our listening had fallen a bit flat, and we hadn't done nearly all that we had hoped or planned to do, seeing these brightly colored learnings come together on the paper was exciting! It brought new energy as we realized we had heard from our neighbors! We quickly noticed that most of our sticky notes were not from the organized listening we had planned, but from the times we just showed up to events, gathering places, or even just the bus stop.

As we moved from accompaniment into interpretation, I saw increased opportunities for sticky notes to be involved! At St. Luke's Episcopal, the team created a 106-year timeline and invited the congregation to add important events. Sticky notes—small and large, square and rectangular, in eight different colors—filled the years highlighting births, deaths, marriages, programs, leadership, and so much

*Innovation Team members and congregants used sticky notes to create a 106-year timeline for St. Luke's Episcopal Church. Different colors representing stories of high, low, or growth. Photo credit: St. Luke's Episcopal Church*





more. The congregation later went through and labeled these sticky notes as high or low or growth points in their congregation. Then, they sat together and shared these stories: one person's memory triggering another, full of laughs and happy sighs of remembrance. I was asked by more than one member if we were keeping the timeline permanently. I raised my eyebrow about the brightly colored sticky notes becoming a permanent feature of their space, but it was about more than the sticky notes. These sticky notes hold stories that have carried this congregation and that hold life-giving potential for the future of this community.

These sticky note activities have been great. They've added color to our thinking and allowed for both individual and group reflection, but they still haven't used the sticky notes to their full potential yet. See, in my opinion, the best use of sticky notes is when you have a whole bunch of them with a whole bunch of ideas, and you can move, re-stick, add, or throw away and create order out of chaos. It's like a puzzle seeking order, and I find this life-giving!

By the end of February, the team at Trinity Lutheran Congregation had conducted four adult forum hours around interpretation topics of our story and God's story. The team had met with multiple community leaders and residents and had showed up to numerous events, activities, and gatherings in the community. When we gathered for our March meeting, I brought all of the reflections/notes and "data" that the team had collected over the past five months. We walked through it, reviewed it, added things that were missing, and then I gave them sticky notes: every size and shape and color!

The team quickly picked pink to represent Trinity and everyone began writing the themes, values, events, activities, descriptions, actions, and phrases that stood out to them. When the activity dwindled, they chose orange to represent the neighborhood and began writing again. Soon, the board in front of us was covered in orange and pink sticky notes. The team began to group them, moving the sticky notes from place to place. Soon, they were adding arrows to show how the groupings influence each other and noticing that

some groupings were all orange, others all pink, and others had both colored sticky notes.

This project is still a work in progress. The team has taken these stories and weaved them together in a way that is making new meaning that they hadn't noticed before. These pink and orange sticky notes are holding and blending stories and potential for Trinity's work to accompany the neighborhood's work; they are holding a grant proposal.

It was those piles of sticky notes that Isra saw me combing through the other day at Trinity when she called me the treasurer of sticky notes. And I'll wear that title proudly, because in these sticky notes, I believe there is treasure. Sure, they are a bunch of brightly colored pieces of paper with a bit of sticky glue on one end, but they're holding stories and learnings and hopes and fears and dreams. **And in their brightly colored, organizing way, they are helping us ask new questions, see different connections, and begin to discern the work that God is calling us to participate in.**



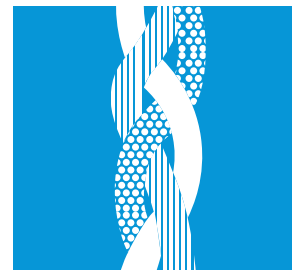
*Trinity Lutheran Congregation used sticky notes to see connections and weave stories together.*

*Photo credit: Trinity Lutheran Congregation*

# THE CHALLENGES OF WEAVING THREE STORIES TOGETHER

## FAQ about interpretation

Interpretation is what makes the Public Church Framework different from many other approaches to this kind of work. The work of gathering and then weaving together the three stories - neighbors' story, God's story, and our story - can be challenging but worth the effort. Together, these stories take on a new significance that may mean some of the stories or ideas we previously held need to be set aside so we can see the whole story of what God is up to among ALL of us, more clearly.



*We are confident about our community's identity, values, history, and missions. Do we still need to practice interpretation?*

Yes, interpretation is the time for you to start weaving together your community's stories, God's stories, and the neighbor's stories you listened to in the work of accompaniment. This interpretive move puts the stories of God's activity—in our neighborhoods, in our congregations and in the Bible into conversation with each other. It helps us see the bigger picture so we can discern how God is inviting or perhaps pleading with us to show up faithfully in our context.

*"... it is clear that God has called us to be present in this community, with these individuals, to lead in particular ways... We have organizers, storytellers, theologians, caregivers, accountants, artists, and so many more incredible leaders. I have seen God at work revealing the power of our community and challenging us to step into new and powerful roles."*

*— Innovation Team, University Lutheran Church of Hope*

*"I learned a lot about our church history. I think the biggest thing I took away was that we are and strive to be welcoming, loving, and nurturing. I think those are great aspects and something we should be proud of. I also think we should be taking those aspects out into the neighborhoods to show what we are about."*

*— Innovation Team, St. Luke's Episcopal Church*

Allow those stories, questions, and answers to shape the direction of your project and the conversations you have inside and outside of the church.

*"We will need to be comfortable with challenging the congregation and our young adults to act on what we have learned about our community."*

*— Innovation Team, Faith Lutheran Church*

*We have not done enough accompaniment to move on to interpretation. Is it possible to do both at the same time?*

You can practice both artforms at the same time by listening and talking to your congregants and your neighbors. Some faith communities said that talking to their neighbors, other congregational partners and those in their congregation helped them explore new aspects of their identities and how to weave together their stories, God's stories, and the neighborhood's stories. The artforms are not intended to be isolated activities and often will and should pour into each other. They are focused on in a particular order in this project to foster learning and skills to practice each of them.

*"Talking with other teams helped me to identify what is unique about our church and the community's experiences."*

*— Innovation Team, Pilgrim Lutheran Church*

*"I had a chat with an avid historian of the Seward neighborhood, he would be an excellent person to speak at Bethany about the rich culture of Bethany and the neighborhood."*

*— Innovation Team, Bethany Lutheran Church*

Some teams shared that they believe they need to continue doing accompaniment and building this practice into their culture.

*"I sense that 'Neighbor's Story' will need to continue to be a part of our work into the grant years. I think that cross-generational connection for young adults and people of other age groups is critical for building community in Christ. I'm looking forward to talking about images and stories of God that connect with what is emerging with us!"*

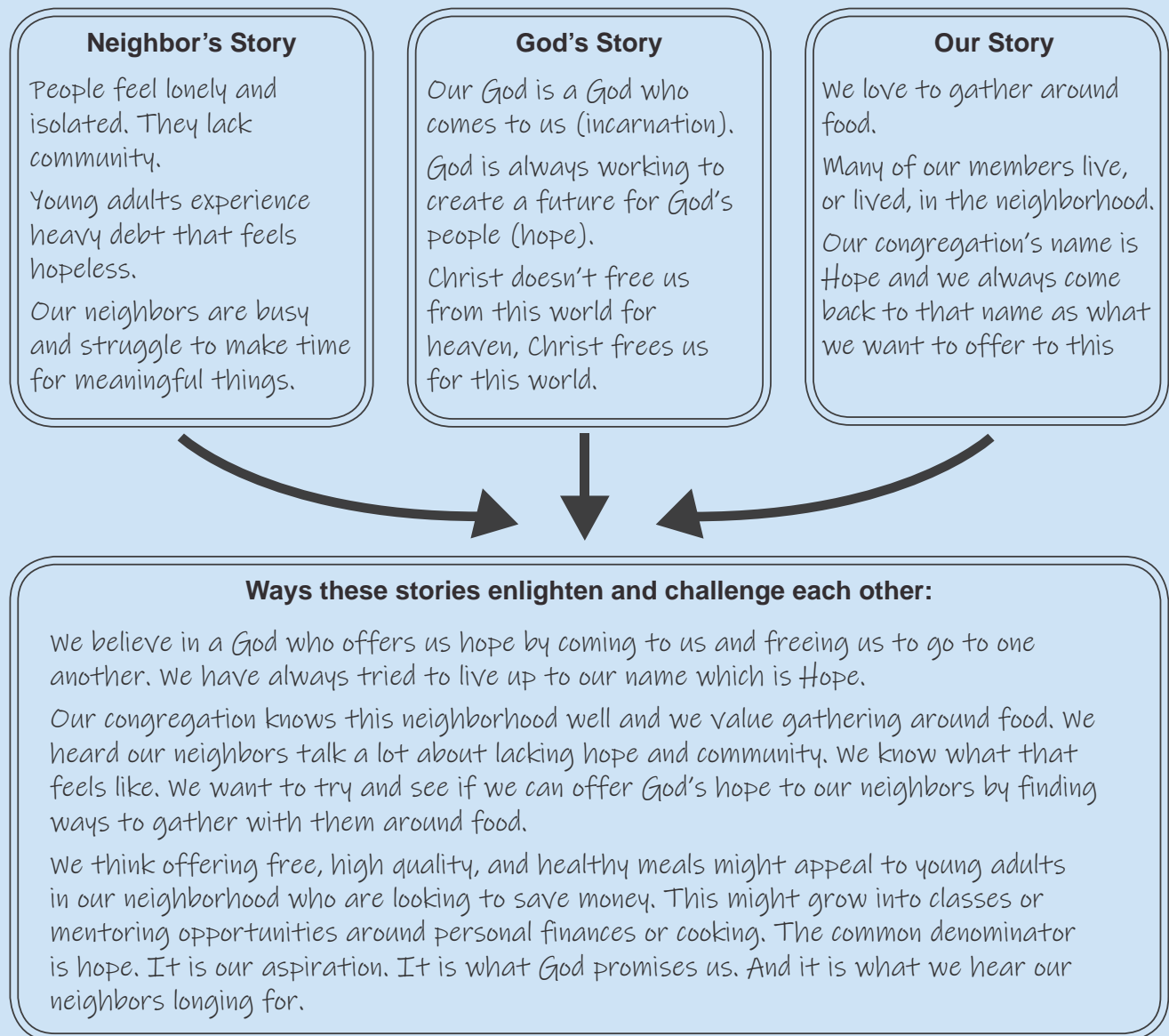
*— Innovation Team, Pilgrim Lutheran Church*

## What's Next?

If you and your faith community are eager to begin practicing the artform of interpretation, then consider some of these exercises.

1. Identify the components of the biblical narrative that have played an important role in shaping the story of your faith community. Spend time with these stories with your congregation, wondering together about why they are important and what function they play in your faith community.
2. If your congregation can not identify components of the biblical narrative that are important to its life, then spend time introducing your congregation to the biblical narrative. *Manna and Mercy* by Daniel Erlander is an excellent overview of the biblical narrative which uses the themes of manna and mercy to tie the narrative together.
3. Work with leaders of your faith community to identify the core beliefs of the faith community. Who is God? What does God do in our world? How does God do God's work? Where does God do this work? When does God do this work? Why does God do this work in this way?
4. Once you have identified the components of the biblical narrative and the core beliefs of your faith community, start finding ways to practice with these things as tools that help interpret and understand what is going on in your neighborhood. One way to think about this work is the art of weaving, or braiding, as you take three different stories and begin weaving them together allowing them to influence one another and create something new.

5. Make use of this Interpretation Diagram below. *What are the key things you've heard while listening to your neighbors' stories? Key things your congregation values from God's stories? What are significant components of your congregation's stories that should not be overlooked? How do these three stories help enlighten and challenge one another? Do God's stories change the way we think about our neighbors' stories and/or our own stories? Do our neighbors' stories change the way we think about God's stories and/or our own stories?*



# DISCERNMENT

## Discernment Facts

Time spent per artform

**Months** **2**

Value

### Theological Values

God's spirit is at work calling each of us into the abundant life.

This voice of God which calls us into abundance is often crowded out by other noise and voices.

Thoughtful, prayerful, Christian community can help one another listen more closely to God's voice and the movement of the spirit.

### Practical Values

The community will learn how to listen for God's voice as a way of discerning how to live out their faith in their collective and individual lives.

Discernment can become a valuable tool for the faith community to use whenever it is faced with a decision or opportunity.

Discernment can democratize and flatten a faith communities power structures, empowering all member to play a role in the congregations vision and mission.

**Descriptive Words:** between, probe, intertwine, aware of connections, holding space, responsive, interweaving, clarifying focus, triangulation, where to stand, spiritual venture, call

## What is discernment?

Christian discernment is the prayerful, communal practice of critically seeking to determine how to respond to opportunities God has placed before you. It is different than decision making because it involves a more thoughtful process and period of listening. If your discernment is not preceded by accompaniment and interpretation, then it is simply decision making and not discernment.

## Why is discernment so important?

All of life is discernment, but we usually think of it as decision making. Learning to practice discernment as a faith community helps the members of that faith community learn to practice discernment in their own lives. Many people desire to live their lives with more intentionality: to make informed decisions about how they vote, spend their time and money, etc. Teaching our communities to practice discernment allows them to wonder about and discern the role their faith might play in their everyday lives.

God has gifted us and called us to do good work in this world. Discernment teaches us to be attentive to and responsive to that call and that good work.



## How do you begin to practice discernment?

Here are nine Best Questions to help guide the work of discernment. We hope they will help you start your thinking process and spark creative ideas on how you want to approach this artform.

### Best Questions

1. Where do we see death and resurrection in our neighborhood?
2. Where are we hearing lamentation in our neighborhood?
3. Have we been part of the problem? What do we need to confess? To whom? Where? How?
4. Where and with whom do we sense the Holy Spirit pleading with us to linger, to pay more attention, to listen more closely?
5. What questions do we still have? Where might we learn more about these questions or with whom do we need to visit?
6. What are the passions and strengths of our faith community that seem to present themselves as assets in light of what we have seen and heard in our accompaniment and interpretation? (For example, space, people, finances, vision, relationships, etc.)
7. If gospel is good news, what is the good news that needs to be proclaimed in our neighborhood in order to liberate people from the bad news we have heard in the neighborhood?
8. How are we equipped to proclaim this good news? How are we not?
9. Given what we have seen and heard in our neighbors' stories, God's stories, and our stories—who is God calling us to be? What is God calling us to do? What might God be calling us to sacrifice or risk? How is God calling us to show up in this community?



*In an effort to help new international students at Augsburg University learn about the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood and Augsburg's relationship with its neighbors, the International Student and Scholar Service brought them to Soup For You! Café, a unique community gathering place located in the basement of Bethany Lutheran Church.*

*Photo credit: Soup For You! Café*

# highlight

## From Decision Making to Discernment: Practicing Discernment at University Lutheran Church of Hope

Written by Amanda Vetsch, Innovation Coach

*The following story is from Amanda Vetsch, one of the RIH's Innovation Coaches. She shares her team's experiences with discernment at University Lutheran Church of Hope (ULCH.) ULCH is located in Dinkytown near the University of Minnesota campus. Their work this year has focused on the challenges and opportunities of being a church in meaningful relationships with young neighbors who are experiencing frequent transition.*

The Innovation Team at ULCH had a meeting to begin discerning their next most faithful steps in response to all that they had been hearing, seeing, and learning through the artforms of accompaniment and interpretation. The conversation began with a grounding reflection, responses to that reflection, and flowed into naming the main themes from the stories we've heard or learned about thus far. Then, we began to brainstorm the ways that we might respond to those stories and came up with a couple of ideas to write into the grant. We moved toward making a plan to write the grant and set some due dates for ourselves.

There was very little enthusiasm to begin writing or researching. As the Innovation Coach, this concerned me. I wanted my team to be excited about the work they are being called into. I didn't want to shut down their idea, but I did need to investigate why the energy was low. Maybe it had nothing to do with the grant idea and more to do with the post-lunchtime lull, or the busyness in their work or personal lives, or maybe it was me projecting my own ideas

onto what I expected them to come up with for the grant. As all good coaches do, I sent out an evaluation form. The form asked questions such as:

1. On a scale from 1 – 10, how much energy do you have when you think about the work of the Innovation Team?
2. If we were to start ALL over at the beginning of this work, where would you focus the accompaniment energy?
3. If there were NO boundaries to money, energy, or anything, what would you do for the grant proposal?

These questions were strategic. I wanted to know why the energy seemed low at our meeting. I wanted to know if they felt content with the listening they had done thus far and I wanted to push them to dream a little bit bigger in a more anonymous form. We also had a few one to one conversations amongst ourselves and multiple folks self identified that the group energy was low. In reflecting upon this meeting, one team member said, "I think we felt a certain pressure to produce something in that first meeting. So we were pushing ourselves to come up with a really tangible product, and I don't think we felt like we had the freedom to say that we had more listening to do."

On the surface this meeting went well, we talked about the things we were supposed to talk about, we reflected on what we had learned, and came up with an idea. **In theory,**

**our idea was rooted in the intersection between God's Story, Our Story, and Neighbor's Story so it should have felt good, but we trusted our guts and realized that we had made plans and decisions. We hadn't actually practiced discernment.**

Then, the question was how do we go from decision making to discernment? For the ULCH Innovation Team, it meant reconvening our team. This time we started by rooting ourselves in a reflection practice that pushed us away from the tendency to intellectualize and into dwelling in the emotional responses. We took thirty minutes at the beginning of the meeting to reflect, dwell in, and share the ways that we had felt the Spirit moving in this work. The specific question was, "During the artform of (accompaniment / interpretation / discernment), when did you feel most alive? Remember the specific moment. What did it feel like, sound like, smell like?" Each person at the meeting had an opportunity to share their memory. In some ways, I'm sure this activity could have felt like a waste of time. We weren't learning any new information and we weren't following the action plan to complete the grant by the impending due date. Yet, we needed to take time to reflect in this way because it allowed us to reorient ourselves. We needed to shift out of the comfortable way of reflecting on our learnings as nuggets of information and into a reflection of experiences and awareness of where we sensed God at work.

We challenged ourselves to dream a bit bigger. We tried to imagine a proposal idea that had no limitations to money, time or energy. This led us to collectively realizing we didn't have the information or experiences to represent what our neighborhood and congregation was dreaming about. So we dreamt up ways to begin to hear our neighbors' and congregations' dreams. In reflecting on the second discernment meeting, a team member said, "It was helpful to name the fears, or what feels risky. There's a tendency to want to know beforehand that it's all going to work as we plan it to. And we needed to be able to say, well it's risky and it's supposed to be."

There is no magic formula for discernment. One of the biggest lessons we're learning in this process is that discernment takes time and trust. There is a desire deeply ingrained in us to achieve and be productive, but discernment cannot happen when we focus on the product more than the process. A shift in rhythm has to happen and we have to trust that we have heard, experienced, seen, and felt God at work. For ULCH, this shift in rhythm means slowing down, giving ourselves permission to push back some due dates, and taking notice of where the energy is or isn't so we can reorient our attention to where it is most needed. Being freed from expectations to produce a flashy new thing is allowing our team at ULCH to tend to relationships, stories, and life in our ever-changing neighborhood.

*ULCH shares its grant proposal to other Innovation Teams at the RIH June 1<sup>st</sup> Event.*

*Photo credit: Ha (Cassie) Dong*



*Coach Amanda gives her ULCH team a gift to send her members off for the next phase of the project.*

*Photo credit: Ha (Cassie) Dong*





## THE CHALLENGES OF LIVING IN THE TENSION OF DISCERNMENT

### *FAQ about discernment*

As the three stories of our neighbors, God, and ourselves are woven together, discernment is a place for communally asking the big question: Knowing what we know now: what work, relationships, and/or direction do we feel God calling us in to? Discernment requires an attention to more than information, but also energy, curiosity, and an imagination for the Holy Spirit to be in the mix. Discernment is also not assuming we can fully know what God needs of us or our faith communities. Rather it is leaning into the nudges of the Spirit and being okay with the uncertainty of what this requires of us. In order to live with the tension of uncertainty, discernment is trusting the glimpses of clarity that arise, the work of the Spirit, and the mystery of God.



*This is a project about innovation. How will we know if our idea is innovative enough?*

The RIH has defined innovation theologically as vocation. If you are discerning how God is calling you to be in life-giving relationships with your neighbor that honor the humanity of your neighbors and the gifts of your faith community, then we believe what you are doing is innovative. The goal is not “an innovation” such as creating a new program and then being “done.” The intent is rather adopting a way of being church, a way of being in relationship, a way of paying attention, that leaders and faith communities can respond innovatively/vocationally as often as our neighbor’s stories might require us to.

*What if we go through the discernment work and it still is not clear to us what we should be doing?*

This is pretty common and it could be a sign of a couple things. First, it might mean you need to go back and do some more accompaniment and/or interpretation. Maybe there are certain voices you did not hear from during accompaniment or maybe you are still missing the theological or biblical insight that will help you with your interpretation of the neighbors’ stories. Second, and most likely, you might be over-thinking discernment and expecting clarity that your idea is the perfect idea. This is where you have permission to take risks and try some things. It is okay to be wrong and to fail. Just go gently so you are not wronging or failing your neighbor.

*This seems like a lot of work to make a decision we probably would have made months ago without having spent all this time and energy. Why are we doing this?*

First, discernment is more than making a decision and requires more than information, deliberation and planning. Second, the Christian life is all about discerning how God is freeing us and calling us to serve the world. Sometimes this is quick and easy work. Sometimes it is slow and difficult. It is important for Christian communities to learn how it feels to work through the slow and difficult work of discerning God’s call. You might end up at the same place you were at in the beginning, but hopefully there has been some significant learning and insight along the way. This slow, steady work allows others to find their way into the work and it creates space for your community to truly listen to your neighbors and think theologically about what they have said.

What if we are  
wrong?

You might be. And grace abounds. This work does not end at discernment or even proclamation. This way of being church is cyclical. We keep moving through the artforms of accompaniment, interpretation, discernment, and proclamation. This way of being church isn't chronological, a way to move from point A to point B. It is a way of being, a way of moving in and out of our places, our communities, our comfort zones, our assumptions. It is a framework to foster life-giving communities that blend the walls that separate us. The work of moving through the artforms is a way to breathe and be—a way to live and a way to share life-giving love that changes us all.

## What's Next?

If you and your faith community are eager to begin practicing this artform of discernment, then consider some of these exercises.

1. Learn more about the Christian practice of discernment. Listening Heart Ministries ([listeninghearts.org](http://listeninghearts.org)) is a great place to get started.
2. Begin incorporating more silence and contemplative prayer practices into your daily lives and into your faith communities life together, including meetings.
3. Some simple but powerful questions to ask within your faith community include, Why? Why not? How? How can we do things differently?
4. Spend time wondering if the key practices of your faith community communicate the key beliefs your faith community holds about God. If not, what might you do to align these?
5. Look for members of your faith community who are known for asking tough questions and not settling for easy answers. Ask them to be a part of your discernment process. These people will very likely be young people in your congregation.
6. Always work to bring a variety of people, voices, and experiences to the table when seeking to do the work of discernment. The more diverse your discernment group is, the richer your discernment will be.



# PROCLAMATION

## Proclamation Facts

Time spent per artform

**Months**

**1**

**Value**

### Theological Values

God's creative word which called the world into existence becomes incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. This same creative word is now entrusted to us.

God's spirit empowers us to proclaim this creative word into our world in ways that bring about life and redemption.

This life-giving, creative, and redemptive word is proclaimed by all God's creation through word and deed.

### Practical Values

Proclaiming good news into our neighbors' bad news will transform the lives of our neighbors, our neighborhoods, and our faith communities.

Practicing proclamation together helps those in a faith community learn how they are empowered by God's spirit to speak and act good news into the lives of those they know.

Practicing proclamation as part of the Public Church Framework helps us see proclamation is not just words we say to people but also acts we take on behalf of all creation.

**Descriptive Words:** showing up, love together, loving contextually, mutual transformation, becoming visible, beyond, declare, subjectively informed intentionality, good news, liberation

## What is proclamation?

Proclamation happens when good news is spoken or enacted into life that challenges or displaces bad news that is present in that life. The good news will always be the good news of Jesus, but that good news of Jesus will look and sound different depending upon the ways in which our neighbors are experiencing bad news.

Jesus announces his public ministry by quoting Isaiah in Luke 4. He says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (NRSV)

Proclamation happens when the poor receive good news, when captives are released, when sight is restored, when the oppressed are freed. These forms of proclamation are good news because they are transforming lives. In the Public Church Framework, proclamation happens after we have accompanied our neighbor and heard their story, after we have considered their story in light of God's promises, and after we have listened to and discerned the call of God in that moment.

## Why is proclamation so important?

Our proclamation becomes one way in which God works transformation into our world. We proclaim the good and liberating news of Jesus through both our words and our deeds, in whatever form is needed from our neighbor in that time. We are called and freed by Christ to proclaim this good news into our world. The intentional practice of the art of proclamation helps the members of our faith communities see the role they play to doing God's work in our world.

## How do you begin to practice proclamation?

Here are nine Best Questions to help guide the work of proclamation. We hope they will help you start your thinking process and spark creative ideas on how you want to approach this artform.

### Best Questions

1. How will this new story we wish to tell bring life and human flourishing to the neighborhood?
2. How is this good news already being proclaimed in the neighborhood?
3. Does anything need to die in order for this new story to live?
4. Where is the best place for this to happen? What is the best way to do this?
5. How might Christ show up in this proclamation?
6. What do we need to do to live into who God is calling us to be, what God is calling us to do, what God is calling us to sacrifice or risk, and how God is calling us to show up in this neighborhood?
7. Who needs to be a part of proclaiming and creating this new story (individuals, organizations, existing partners, neighbors, etc.)? How do these people also become proclaimers of good news?
8. Who are the stakeholders we need to engage to live into this new story? What strategies do we have to engage these folks?
9. Take some time to be honest about the potential for failure.  
How might our proclamation of this good news fail at the levels of tactics, strategy and vision? What are the barriers? How is our perspective limited? How might these potentials for failure shape our plan for proclamation?

*Hub staff visits the headwater of the Mississippi River in May 2019 to celebrate a year of working, learning, and building relationships together as a faith community.*

*Photo credit: Riverside Innovation Hub*



# highlight

## God in the Present Tense: A Story of Unfolding Proclamation at New City Church

Written by Baird Linke, Innovation Coach

*Congregations in the Riverside Innovation Hub partnership have spent the better part of a year moving through the Public Church Framework and taking stock of the learning and wonderings these experiences have generated. In the spring of 2019, teams submitted proposals for grant funds that outline their vision of the proclamation work they want to live into over the next two years. One of our Innovation Coaches, Baird Linke, shares the story of how this movement towards and into proclamation has and continues to unfold at New City Church.*

Let's hear it for the good news! Ten months gone by, and the churches connected to the Riverside Innovation Hub are preparing to put all their hard work and learning into implementing their grant applications! We are gathering to share our stories, to celebrate work well-done, and give thanks for the ways we have grown together. This is the stage in the Public Church Framework called proclamation, but it is not complete just by sharing the stories of the past year. Proclamation is not reporting—it does not live in the past-tense—to proclaim the good news is to invite others into the exciting “we know not what we will be” of what God is doing in the here and now. Proclamation is both remembering together where God's been with us and joyfully participating in where God is going.

I have worked with New City Church in Powderhorn-Phillips through this program, and I want to share their good news with you. New City Church is trying to do church in a new way (shocking, I know). The planters of New City recognize the complicity of mainline

Christianity in the history of white supremacy, cis-heteronormativity, patriarchy, and environmental degradation. Their goal in planting the church was to counter that history with a model of church that centers marginalized voices. They do that by prioritizing the experiences of people of color, the environment, LGBTQ+ people, and women in the life of the church. They have grown quickly since starting out in a living room and have done so while talking explicitly about Jesus to a community that, by percentages, does not necessarily identify as Christian.

Their plan for the Innovation Hub grant is to use the resources for a new effort called **the Incarnation Fund** that will connect people of color in the New City community to healing practices including somatic experiencing therapy, nature-based therapy, and spiritual direction. Participants will work in small cohorts to grow in community while, as individuals, work with practitioners of color on healing from trauma. New City believes that investing in individual healing makes communal healing possible. This vision hinges on a key belief that guides New City Church (and illustrates proclamation well): *inward transformation leads to outward transformation and vice-versa*.

Many members of New City Church are already engaged in projects for outward transformation in the community. It is an activist church and the wealth of talents and community connections that New City holds was overwhelming at first. How could we choose just one cause to come behind, especially when there are already groups whose entire focus is on one of the many needs that New City cares about?



We realized that we needed to dig into New City's young identity to find a use of the money that fit. We asked people about what value people found in New City and realized that it wasn't that New City was doing the same justice work that the members are doing. People value New City because it gives them a place to root their work into a relationship with the divine and challenges people to learn how to be in a diverse community that centers marginalized voices. The community organizers didn't need New City to be another organizer. The advocates didn't need another advocate. They need a place where they can hear that they are not alone—that God is moving through a community with them. They are hungry for inward transformation.

A lot of resources have been spent over the last year on the inward transformation of white people in order to be in a racially diverse community where the cultural norms around white-body supremacy are broken down. That work has yielded huge dividends for the health of the New City community, and at the same time has dedicated time and energy into formation for white folks. Recognizing that disparity, New City wanted to balance the scales and use the

Innovation Hub grant—the largest financial investment to come to New City outside of the Methodist church—to prioritize ministry for people of color. The Incarnation Fund took both of these needs we identified and aligned the creation of something new with the story of life that New City Church has been telling from the start.

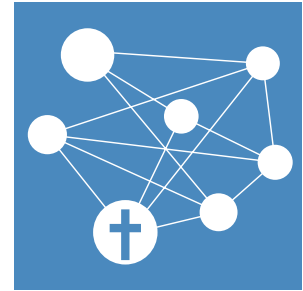
The story of God is evolving and diversifying in different places and circumstances. Small changes in the genetic code result in wildly different forms of life, but it is all life. Our job in proclamation is to be spiritual ecologists, surveying the landscape for life in its abundance, celebrating old connections, new growth, and working to make that growth possible. The Incarnation Fund is rooted in this ecological vision of our communities—the healing of the whole is directly tied to the healing of the parts. The story of New City Church and the Incarnation Fund is just beginning, and it is one of many. I give thanks for the ways that God is moving in your hearts and communities, and I pray for courage and faith as you move forward sharing the good news you have heard and are a part of creating. Let's hear it for the good news! Amen.

*New City Church gives presentation about its grant proposal at the RIH June 1<sup>st</sup> Event  
Photo credit: Ha (Cassie) Dong*



# What proclamation might look like

The 16 RIH partner congregations have been engaging with the public church framework artforms of accompaniment, interpretation, and discernment in their unique contexts this past year. The culmination of their learnings is taking shape in a two year plan for proclamation as Innovation Teams wonder about the new story God is calling them to co-create with their neighbors. Thanks to funding through the Lilly Endowment, RIH is able to further invest in these new ideas and new stories through granting dollars to support their creative experiments. Here are some glimpses of the work and stories congregations plan to enter in to in the coming years.



## **Bethany Lutheran Church**

*Minneapolis, MN*



Through exploring congregational vitality, Bethany Lutheran is seeking to increase their capacity to be faithful stewards of their neighbors' stories and the relationships they have cultivated over the years. As a small but faithful community, Bethany has opened its doors to its neighborhood for many years, especially its homeless neighbors, vulnerable neighbors, Muslim neighbors and youngest neighbors through the ministries of Soup for You! Cafe, CAIR and a neighborhood preschool. The resources of time, funds and learning relationships offered through the RIH will support the Bethany Innovation Team through discerning how this small congregation might do the work of the midwife to help birth the next chapter of Bethany and its life-giving relationship with its neighbors.

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## **Bethlehem Lutheran Church**

*Minneapolis, MN*



Root to Rise Project: Bethlehem Lutheran partners with Community Cloud Forest Conservation (CCFC), a Guatemalan organization that educates and trains young leaders to alleviate poverty and protect the forest. Young adults, sensing the urgency to listen and respond to all of God's creation, have started an onsite community garden ministry. Our proposal works to deepen and connect these two ministries in meaningful ways through travel grants, eco-justice theological education, intergenerational food prep and green advocacy and structural changes.



### Church of All Nations

Columbia Heights, MN



Led by our young adults' commitment to care for all of God's creation and protect the environment for future generations, Church of All Nations' project incorporates their passion for community engagement both within our congregation and extending to our human and non-human neighbors as we reshape our property according to a *long-term permaculture design*. Reading groups, documentary and discussion nights, and other educational events are blended seamlessly with grounds work, water research, and plant cultivation to create intentional spaces in which the sacred is honored in all forms of life as we move toward healing and restoration together as one diverse but unified body.

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### Fabric

Minneapolis, MN



We wish to gain insight into vital issues and circumstances unique to young adults in our reach to help us imagine how to be a valuable source for them to connect through difference-making conversations. We will engage and grow new leadership by running various fast, small, and focused experiments testing what works to connect young adults around those vital life-places. Shaped through parameters of *The Lean Startup*, by Eric Ries, we will create, launch, and observe Model 1; gather and digest feedback to modify Model 2; and repeat. We hope to find a model that is strong, dynamic, sustainable, and replicable enough to be worthy of significant ongoing investment.

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### Faith Lutheran Church

Coon Rapids, MN



As a congregation, we have taken on the mission of being a "Loving, Serving Community." Throughout the partnership with the Riverside Innovation Hub, we have taken that lens to explore what God is doing at Faith and within our community. What we discerned is a multi-pronged approach designed for young adults to take the lead on engaging the community outside of our walls. This will take shape through a new relationship young adults initiated with a local elementary school, attending and supporting local Transformative Circles as places to continue community building efforts with local young adults around meals, exercise, and accompaniment practices.

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### Holy Trinity Lutheran Church

Minneapolis, MN



Our Innovation Team is excited to launch the *Humans of Longfellow*—a story-sharing, community-connecting effort to create a new sense of community and relationship in the Longfellow neighborhood. We will tap into a common sense of isolation (in person, political, spiritual, and community matters) and give people spaces (both physically and online) to be truly heard and appreciate each other's humanity. These spaces will take the form of a story-telling workshop and conference led by Mark Yaconelli and a local community organizer, yoga classes with a spirit-mind-body focus with story circles afterward. Life Together dinners for small groups to practice openness and vulnerability and other venues, including a social media campaign and consideration of a podcast. We hope deepened sharing and openhearted listening will open up new possibilities for relationships, love of our neighbors, hope in humanity, and collective action.



### **New City Church**

*Minneapolis, MN*

New City Church works to center marginalized voices and is dedicated to raising up inspired and skilled leaders to bring about God's transformation in the world. That commitment has led to the creation of the Incarnation Fund. The Incarnation Fund supports cohorts of people of color as they access spiritual direction, somatic experiencing (a form of trauma therapy), and nature-based therapy. This investment is inspired by our faith that transformed people transform the world, and is a celebration of the incredible talents and hearts in our community. Combined with New City's current work for undoing white-body supremacy, this grant will help launch New City Church into a new chapter of deep spiritual work that will benefit people of color, the entire church community and, ultimately, the whole city of Minneapolis.

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### **Our Redeemer Lutheran Church**

*St. Paul, MN*

While working through experiments with accompaniment, our team discovered shared curiosities among leaders and young adults at neighboring congregations also wrestling with how to respond to our changing culture and community. In the next stage of the partnership, ORLC is seeking funding to host monthly gatherings around food and storytelling for young adults. This collaborative will also be learning and practicing accompaniment together in our neighborhoods. This will be an opportunity to develop deeper relationships of trust and exploration of deeper issues in our lives and community. We hope this will help us discern new ways we live out our faith in this community with our neighbors.

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### **Pilgrim Lutheran Church**

*St. Paul, MN*

Our proposal consists of four workstreams, two we will develop during the first year and two we will explore during the second year. The first stream is a series of interactive art projects that will be installed outside the church in the surrounding neighborhood, with the goal of increasing visibility and inviting our neighbors into a conversation about what faith means to them. The second stream is establishing a modified young adult gathering that incorporates guest speakers, community building, and conversation. In the second year we will explore other projects including developing a program for "Blessings for Real Life" to acknowledge young adult transitional moments or milestones, and a project to create an intentional young adult residential community.



### **Redeemer Lutheran Church**

*Minneapolis, MN*

Redeemer's Innovation Team plans to use grant funds to strengthen our relationship with a Northside Parish congregation, Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church, through community building events, and cooperation with their longstanding food-serving presence at the State Fair. These funds will allow us to walk alongside our Northside siblings, and model proven community building activities, as we plant the seeds for a sustainable community-centered witness, with collaboration at it's core.

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### **Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church**

*Hopkins, MN*

From public pastor to public church: our goal is to create long-term cultural change that drives toward deepened young adult and community connection and engagement. Through a church leadership consultant, we will work to live our strategic desire to be a positive influence in our community by envisioning what expectations we need to have for church council leadership and engagement in the community. Through the commissioning of a new liturgy written by a team of pastor, musician, church, and community leadership, we will work to reflect the needs, hurts, and hopes of our community in worship. Through a partnership with one of Hopkins' most influential community engagement leaders, we will work to move from a volunteer model to a model of community engagement. By creating a community podcast, we will interview community members and leaders about their hopes and dreams for our community alongside the ways they care for and tend to their soul and spirit. Lastly, we will deploy our program staff into community as community chaplains to listen, learn, and provide "chaplaincy care" to young adults and other members of our community.

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### **St. Andrew Lutheran Church**

*Eden Prairie, MN*

St. Andrew will be planning regular gatherings of young adults (two per quarter) around themes of being playful and faithful. We will also be forming a fund for innovation grants that would allow each be led by a young adult sponsor. The sponsor would then be paired with funding for their project, funding for personal development, and an intergenerational cohort of St. Andrew members to work on the project together.

### St. Luke's Episcopal Church

Minneapolis, MN



Over the next five years, St Luke's wants to tell our neighbors a different story of what it means to be a Christian. To do this, we have created a brand new initiative called *Peacecraft*, which is designed to provide pathways from the church into our neighborhood by exploring the holistic transformation which emerges from spiritual practice. We have identified these as vocational calling, environmental stewardship, nonviolent conflict resolution and spiritual wellness. In conjunction with this, we will re-imagine the green space in front of our church building in order to connect, share hospitality, meet and tell stories with those around us who have a stake in the wellbeing of our neighborhood.

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### St. Timothy Lutheran Church

St. Paul, MN



In five years, the story St. Timothy wishes to tell centers around curiosity. We want to learn with young adults and the multiple worlds in which they work, learn, and live. Allowing young adults to lead and gather us through partnership, we want to listen and be cognizant of the stories, ideally in the teller's own voices, they tell around personal, social and spiritual transformation in daily life. Ultimately, rather than focusing on ways in which young adults are not "in church," we wish to illuminate the innovative ways young adults and learners of all ages have leveraged their curiosity to create connection, community and purpose, whether or not that includes our traditional understanding of what it means to be religious or faith-filled.

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### Trinity Lutheran Congregation

Minneapolis, MN



In listening to our neighbors, Trinity's Innovation Team has heard a strong concern for East African young men who are most vulnerable to the effects of drug use and violence in Cedar-Riverside. Consistent with Trinity's identity of living our faith beyond our walls and providing safe space for our neighbors, we seek to partner with Daryeel ("care" in Somali), a grassroots initiative led by Abdirahman Mukhtar, who personally knows the youth of our neighborhood. Through Daryeel and on his own dime, Abdi has been building relationships and establishing resources for crisis intervention at the most critical time and place of the week for our neighborhood: Friday nights at the intersection of Cedar and Riverside Avenues. As partners, we hope to show solidarity and lend our resources to Abdi, walking with him and the young adults he is mentoring to foster safe space in our community for the young people who need it most.

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### University Lutheran Church of Hope

Minneapolis, MN



In the first year we will engage in a Neighborhood Deep Listening Campaign, utilizing a number of strategies including door to door canvassing, "Listening Posts" at a local business, and creatively leveraging our ongoing ministry of the Dinkytown Farmer's Market. In the second year, we will explore the ways to expand access to our building as a "third space" or gathering space in the neighborhood, as well as some dollars set aside for whatever else emerges from the first year of neighborhood listening.





# Looking Ahead

A Message From Augsburg University's  
President Paul C. Pribbenow

A Message From RIH Faculty Lead  
Jeremy Myers





## A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT PAUL C. PRIBBENOW

What has always intrigued me about the idea behind the Riverside Innovation Hub (RIH) is the way in which it points to a mutually beneficial partnership between congregations and our church-related universities—what I see as a 21st century vision of congregational relations for our colleges and universities.

The RIH starts with the premise that congregations and universities have important lessons to learn from each other. That premise means that the lived experiences of congregations—with their various commitments to word, sacrament, and service—intersect with the teaching, learning, and research mission of a liberal arts university, enabling a rich and robust conversation about how we all might live more faithfully as God's people in the world.

In particular, as the RIH has focused on the faith lives of young adults, it also has challenged us to imagine what a “public church” looks like in the 21st century, coming alongside young people where they live out their faith in the world—even if that means that such accompaniment is outside the walls of the traditional church. I eagerly await the findings of the RIH and the ways in which the partnerships it has developed with congregations and other faith communities set a path for our future work at Augsburg and beyond.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "P. C. Pribbenow". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

**Paul C. Pribbenow**  
*President, Augsburg University*



## A MESSAGE FROM RIH FACULTY LEAD JEREMY MYERS

The work we have been doing as the Riverside Innovation Hub will continue as the primary work of Augsburg University's Christensen Center for Vocation (CCV). CCV exists to help congregations live into their call as a faithful neighbor in their location and in relationship with their neighbors in ways that proclaim good news and hope in those places and relationships.

When faith communities are engaged in their local neighborhoods—seeking to discern their call from God in that place—they are being innovative. Innovation happens when we are listening to our neighbor, discerning God's call, and responding in hope. Augsburg University's CCV will help make this work happen in your community. We have much to learn from each other as we do this work together.

CCV will continue creating collaborative partnerships with faith communities and their neighborhoods. Faith communities have neighbors worth knowing and Augsburg University has resources that can help you come to know your neighbor more fully. CCV will help leverage these resources across the university to help faith communities do this work whether it involves engaging with diversity, interfaith relationships, leadership with youth and young adults, environmental stewardship, or other ways faith communities we partner with are engaged in living into their calls. We are eager to continue this work as we grow into the public church together, proclaiming the good news in the public square for the sake of our neighbor.

Whether you have been an active part of the learning community whose stories are highlighted in this report or are newly engaged with the Riverside Innovation Hub, we are grateful for you and eager to see what unfolds in the years to come. We look forward to the next collection of stories that take shape in your places and with your people.

God's peace,

**Jeremy Myers**  
*Executive Director, Christensen Center for Vocation*

## THE AUGSBURG MISSION

Augsburg University educates students to be informed citizens, thoughtful stewards, critical thinkers, and responsible leaders. The Augsburg experience is supported by an engaged community that is committed to intentional diversity in its life and work. An Augsburg education is defined by excellence in the liberal arts and professional studies, guided by the faith and values of the Lutheran church, and shaped by its urban and global settings.

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On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing."

—Ezekiel 47:12 (NRSV)



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