



LOCAL CHURCH DISCIPLER/EDUCATOR TRAINING

MODULE 5: MY CONGREGATION AND CONTEXT

OVERVIEW OF TOPICS FOR SELF- OR GROUP STUDY

The self-study and related group activities select from among these topics. As you continue your own professional development, you may wish to dig deeper in these areas.

CULTURE/CONTEXT

- Getting to know the people and the community your church is located in/ SWOT analysis
- Identifying characteristics/ who do we say that we are
- How does this affect the church
- Understanding norms
- What are our common values (espoused and lived)?
- Who are the stakeholders? What are the “sacred cows”?
- What are the unspoken rules and expectations?
- How do I communicate those rules and values to others
- Hospitable space

ASSET IDENTIFICATION

- Facilities and physical resources/ shared space
- Practice good stewardship
- Identify talents and gifts of volunteers and staff
- Identify community assets

DISCIPLESHIP SYSTEMS

- Define disciple, intentional faith development, and faith-forming congregation
- Understand the importance of flow of discipleship/spiritual growth and ways that congregations can foster spiritual growth across the age levels/faith maturity

FAMILY SYSTEMS

- Identify stakeholders (including matriarch/patriarch)
- Understand the unspoken power structure
- See patterns of how people relate to each other

GROUP DYNAMICS

- Family systems/ managing relationships
- Working with difficult people
- Communication patterns
- Conflict resolution

Information Goals: *I will*

1. Know the context, needs, values, norms, and issues of my congregation and community
2. Know the system: the patterns of power, how things get done, who makes decisions, and who the key stakeholders are
3. Know what our assets are in terms of people, supplies, budget, and technology
4. Understand discipleship in this congregation.

Action Goals: *I will*

1. Work with my team to do congregational and community assessment
2. Map out the system of discipleship in the congregation, noting the part my ministry plays in that system
3. Identify the stakeholders and establish a relationship with them
4. Define what discipleship means and looks like within the bounds of my ministry

Key Result:

I have a thorough picture of the congregation, community, and the disciple making process in my church. I understand the “chain of command” in the church and am able to work within that structure. I am well enough acquainted with the congregational values and norms to be able to understand the system of discipleship and to work for improvement where needed. I have a good working relationship with the other leaders and stakeholders so that we can move ahead faithfully and effectively.

LEARNING PLANS

CORE ACTIVITIES for SELF-STUDY OPTION

1. Select an Accountability Partner

This is someone (with **no** supervisory role) who will help you to keep on track and with whom you can talk and reflect on your learnings and experiences.

Read the suggested materials. Schedule them to be interspersed among the other activities. As you read, consider what the texts have to say about the Module 5 topics mentioned above.

2. Examine Your Context

Step back and look at your context as if you are seeing it for the first time. Plan for a casual outing with teachers and group leaders who are willing. Go to a local mall, downtown area, or other community location. Take a notebook to jot down what you see. Split up, mill around, and just observe. Who is there? Who's missing? How are people dressed? What are they doing? How are they interacting? How do they seem to feel? What might you assume about values and norms from what you see? When you return to your original gathering place, compare notes.

Do a walking survey through the church with your team and/or teachers and group leaders. Assign a new "identity" to each person that is different from their real identity: an older adult, a person with mobility difficulties, a person with cognitive limitations, a young parent with toddlers, a teenager, a newly single middle adult; and so on. Each one will observe as if a first-time visitor. If you had no relationship with the church, is it a place to which you would want to return, based on your walk-through?

3. Do a SWOT Analysis

With your team or your teachers/group leaders, do a SWOT analysis after the various surveys. The attached worksheet explains "SWOT." Think broadly about assets and think creatively about how to turn previously ignored people or things into assets. Use *The Power of Asset Mapping* to inform this analysis. (*Beyond the RollBook* includes some very helpful charts and process for community and church analysis.) Your analysis will yield some data and raise a lot of assumptions. Plan for how to change those assumptions into clear information, then do it. (Asset mapping will come in Activity 7.

ADDITIONS for GROUP STUDY (Can be peer led or instructor led)

1. Divide the main texts among group members. Each person will take responsibility for developing a list of discussion points on that text and will lead the discussion at group times. Intersperse these group reading/ discussion activities among the other activities. Develop a calendar with the reading list. **There is an intentional flow to this module. Read the whole thing before you start.**

2. Context

Do the same sort of exercise, as a "windshield survey." Set a date by which everyone will have completed their driving survey. First develop a uniform set of survey items (such as the condition of the neighborhood and properties; how many other churches are within the survey area; what businesses are there and their apparent "health"; the ages, gender, and race of who you see; and so on). Take one or two people from your church; one to drive; one or two to take notes. Drive around your assigned area, such as a 3-mile circle around the church or 13 blocks in all directions. Gather after the drive-around and compare notes. Do the people in your church look like the people in the community? How does the facility compare with other structures in the neighborhood? Based on what you only observed from a distance, do the ministries of your church offer any "come" events or experiences that are likely to appeal to the neighborhood residents? Are there any "go" events or experiences that take your members into the neighborhood in an engaging way?

3. SWOT Analysis

Group participants together who come from the same or nearby communities so that they can compare the results of their SWOT analyses, particularly the Threats and Opportunities, which would be similar for churches in the same neighborhood. Brainstorm together how to share information and to address threats and opportunities. Not every church has to be all things to all people, so think creatively about how to cooperate, focus your ministries, and operate out of unique strengths.

4. Focus on Values and Norms

Focus more specifically on values and norms. Some of this surfaced through activities 2 and 3. (You may find this much easier with a group, especially if you are new to the congregation.) From what you have **heard**, what are the values of the congregation? How do members describe the church? What do they say is important? What will they fight for (and about)? What history will inevitably repeat itself? What values compete? From what you have **seen**, how does behavior support or contradict espoused values?

Do the same sort of reflection on norms. How do things get done? How are people expected to behave in certain places and situations? What are the “invisible” lines that, when crossed, cause conflict? Where are the “sacred” places (as in, “Don’t mess with this”)? Whose opinions and judgments are deferred to? Whose are sought out? Whose are avoided?

Sort out your insights with your accountability partner (or mentor). What comes to light? What does all this mean for your ministry, your place in the church, and how to get things done?

5. Identify “Disciple”

Read *Charting the Course* with particular attention to identifying a “disciple.” Consult with other staff and church leaders about how they define “disciple” and how their ministry area works at making disciples. Talk to teachers and group leaders for their understanding of how what they do makes disciples. (If they don’t know that’s what they are doing, you have a focus for at least one training session.)

6. Plot Out the System

Read “Planning for Christian Education: Focus on the System.” Draw a diagram or map of the church’s system of disciple making. Various ministries can be categorized in more than one way, so just choose where they seem to fit best among Nurture, Outreach, Witness, and Administration. (If your church has developed a clear organizational image, use it instead.) Pay particular attention to how these areas, events, and experiences fit in the whole, as it is described by your church’s mission and/or vision statements. Look at this diagram (or develop it) with your team, teachers and group leaders, accountability partner, or mentor.

4. Values and Norms

Norms and values are so strong, yet so often are not articulated well, if at all. Sometimes the way we learn is by stumbling over a taboo. Indulge in a few “war stories” about what you learned the hard way.

Help each other plan how to tap the norms and values of the congregation and put them to action in your ministry area. Using a “What if?” approach may be helpful because it opens the imagination without having to make a decision just yet. Building on the community profile and adding to it the positive norms and values, write down as many “What if” questions as you can think of. For example, you have a high value for the church as a safe place in a densely populated area. What if our congregation were a strong haven for keeping kids productively busy after school? What if our church were a strong headquarters for neighborhood watch? What if we led the community in cultural and faith awareness?

Let the questions percolate as you look at your systems and assets.

5. Identify “Disciple”

Defining “Disciple” may not be as easy as it seems. Compare notes on how each church has defined or described “disciple.” Is there a specific point at which a person changes into a disciple? If so, how would you identify that point, and what were they before that? If not, how do you know when someone is a disciple?

This is an important place not just for word-smithing, but also for a theological discussion about grace. Use the attached chart “Development of Faith Formation and Discipleship.” How can you identify where people are in this flow?

6. The System

Read or review *Deepening Your Effectiveness*. Discuss how your church is in ministry to the persons represented on the chart (Exercise 5) and how you help them move from one stage of faith to the next.

The discussion of barriers and relationships is especially helpful here. As you look at your system(s), how does the church intentionally help people grow in faith? To develop the relationships they need to grow? To overcome the barriers that limit or stagnate growth?

7. Map Your Assets

Map your congregation's assets with your team, teachers, and/or group leaders. Use the directions in *The Power of Asset Mapping*.

8. Write a summary paper, at least 10 typed pages.

Writing this will push you to formulate your ideas clearly and to be sure they hold together consistently. Bring together your main insights on the topics of this module, including the congregational norms and values, understanding of what a disciple is, your disciple making system, and other cultural and contextual issues within which you conduct your ministry.

Give it to your accountability partner and have a conversation about it.



7. Map Assets

Begin to think about a Ministry Action Plan for your ministry to help you put everything together. A MAP considers your context, congregational identity, vision and mission, values and norms, systems, and assets as a base for planning and implementing disciple making ministries.

Help each other pull together all the information, impressions, and What If? ideas. (Module 6 deals with planning, implementation, and measures.)

8. Summary Paper

Swap your summary papers so that two other people, if possible, read papers other than their own.

You might do the review time in a retreat format. (Read papers in advance.) Ask each other unbiased questions for clarity (meaning no leading or implying what a response should be), so that your group partners can consider their positions on their own without judgment or interference.

SUGGESTED READING LIST

1. *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts*, by Luther K. Snow
2. *Charting the Course: A Workbook on Christian Discipleship*, by Teresa Gilbert, Patty Johansen, Jay Regennitter, with John P. Gilbert.
3. ["Planning for Christian Education: Focus on the System"](http://www.gbod.org/education) (www.gbod.org/education in the tab [Teacher Development](#))
4. *Deepening Your Effectiveness: Restructuring the Local Church for Life Transformation*, by Dan Glover and Claudia Lavy.
5. *Beyond the Roll Book*, by Diana Hynson and Scott Jones

WHAT'S NEXT?

To continue to explore this topic, consider these activities:

1. ["Survey on Basic Christian Education in the Local Church"](http://www.gbod.org/education) (www.gbod.org/education in Teacher Development tab): to think about the congregation, its organization, and planning.
2. Consider joining or forming a Covenant or Accountable Discipleship group. See *Accountable Discipleship*, by Steven Manskar or use "The General Rules of the Methodist Church" (pages 71-74 in the 2008 *Book of Discipline*).
3. Research more on core values, for example, *Values-Driven Leadership: Discovering and Developing Your Core Values for Ministry*, by Aubrey Malphurs.
4. Research and practice conflict resolution and working with difficult people. Read, for example, *How to Work with Just About Anybody*, by Lucy Gill and *How to have That Difficult Conversation You've Been Avoiding With your Spouse, Adult Child, Family, Boss, Coworker, Friend, Parent, or Someone You Are Dating*, By Henry Cloud and John Townsend .
5. Study more on family systems and dynamics.