**Writing For the Local Church**

We start this workshop by emphasizing that words matter. Word illuminate, they comfort, they teach, they speak hope and life. God created through the Word and that Word is alive, speaking in and through us even now.

Hear these words from Isaiah 55:10-11 and hear how God’s word is powerful, intentional, and never in vain:

Just as the rain and the snow come down from the sky
        and don’t return there without watering the earth,
        making it conceive and yield plants
        and providing seed to the sower and food to the eater,

    so is my word that comes from my mouth;
        it does not return to me empty.
        Instead, it does what I want,
        and accomplishes what I intend. —Isaiah 55:10-11 CEB

God puts ideas and words into our hearts to share with others—those words will accomplish what God intends.

Let’s take a few minutes to examine the ways in which Scripture demonstrates the power of words to instruct the church. Divide into groups of 3-4 to discuss these questions for the next 15 minutes or so…

What stories in Scripture demonstrate the power of words to instruct the church?

How has God used words to reach people?

How can modern-day resources help churches reach people for Jesus Christ?

[After 15 minutes, call the group together and invite responses.]

Think about Paul’s letters to the early churches. He was writing to the local church of his day.

* They were specific, to one setting
* He gave organized information with specific themes
* He began with greeting an sprayer, which demonstrates a love of and care for the church
* These letters are still helpful and relevant today.

To write for the church you need at the very least, these two things:

1. **Love the church.**
2. **Know the church.**

Writing for the local church means thoughtfully considering how to serve the church with resources and the written word. That means research, conversations with pastors and church leaders, and listening to people and assessing what churches need to help them make disciples.

Now let’s get really practical. How do you begin a project that is for the local church.

First and foremost, consider this:

When you write for the local church, quite often you are putting words into the mouths of pastors and congregations—liturgies, lessons, songbooks. Or, you are instructing pastors and church members in an aspect of faith, so be

Responsible

* Wesleyan theology
* Methodist polity
* Sound and thoughtful Scripture use

Respectful

* Understand setting and context
* Consider how the resource will be used
* Be an expert without being condescending

Reasoned

* If you’re writing about baptism, anticipate what the reader needs to know—do your research. Know your topic and present it well.

Reliable

* Speak from your experience, what you have tried—success and failures
* Know that it works before you tell it to others

Resources for the local church point people to God. This is good work!

On a piece of paper, draw a picture of a church building. As you look at your little church there, list some descriptions of who might be in that church:

Who is in there?

What is the make up of a congregation?

(invite answers)

A typical congregation might include:

Seekers

Believers

Hungry

Confused

Deceived

Serious

Doubting

Unbelieving

Nominal

As you write for the local church, you narrow your list to one or two categories and keep that audience in the front of your mind throughout your writing project. If you’re writing for Unbelievers and seekers, write to them and for them.

Looking at our list, you can start to consider what churches need in terms of written resources. Remember, we are not only sharing our personal faith journey as a devotion, though some of that might be included. Neither are we writing in lofty theological terms more suited for the academic world.

Typically, resources for the local church will be longer than devotional writing, but much shorter than academic writing.

To write for the local church we must

—use plain language

—be instructive

—focus on a top that is relevant to local church ministry

So let’s think now about what resources the church needs today:

What do local churches need you to write?

What resources would bless, encourage, or serve the local church?

How can these materials help church members grow in faith? as a church? as leaders?

[Brainstorm together as a group—encourage participants to pay attention to a topic they feel passionate about]

Examples of resources for the local church might be: the work of the publishing teams—catechism, hymns, UMC history booklets, Christmas articles, Thanksgiving articles, Sunday school material? Youth materials…

Consider that some writers are great novelists and storytellers. Some writers are wonderful historians. Some are gifted at communicating to young people. What if your gift to write could be expressed through a resource for local churches? As you consider this vision of writing and dream of projects for the local church make sure that you always:

1. Believe in the project
2. Become an expert on the topic
3. Approach the writing and the topic with humility
4. Remember your congregation

To close this session, let’s make a master list of categories appropriate for the local church setting so you have a starting point for creative brainstorming.

(Let the group start the list, but add these to the master list)

Discipleship

Evangelism

Worship/Hymnals

Children

Stewardship

Leadership

Development

Commentaries for church members