



## Process Guide: Open Space Resourcing Conversation Discerning our Congregational Values

*Nourishing Vocation Project  
Living into the Called Life – Today:  
We Discern*

### Supplies Needed:

- This Conversation Guide
- A pack of post-it notes
- Pens or pencils
- Markers
- Poster (either pre-printed or pre-drawn to follow the attached template)
- A willing spirit
- An attitude of humility
- A posture of generosity

### Directions:

- Gather supplies
- Decide groups for conversation – *This guide can be used with nearly any ministry in the congregation. It can be an exercise that is completed in one large group, with participants divided up into groups of people, or it can be completed by various ministries during their own designated meeting times, and then the results collated for a composite view of the congregation*
- If a large group is meeting, divide into smaller groups so that each table of conversation is no more than 6 people
- Follow the steps in this process guide, using the colors indicated for different roles to accomplish the exercise.

Color Key:

**Black Lettering in Italics** indicates group instructions  
**Blue** indicates script for the facilitator to read aloud  
**Purple** indicates time suggestions for the time monitor  
**Green** indicates what is recorded on the poster

This resource was developed by Rev. Dr. Charlene Rachuy Cox as a part of the Nourishing Vocation Project through the Lutheran Center for Faith, Values, and Community at St. Olaf College.



*Welcome and greet each other as you arrive*

*At designated time please begin:*

1. *The facilitator welcomes the group and leads by reading the script in blue*
2. *We begin with individual introductions by going around the circle with each person sharing the following:*

- Name
- One thing that is important to you in your personal life
- Your role within the congregation or ministry
- Look at the image “A Choice.” Share what you see.
- *We will take 5-7 minutes to do all of the above.*

3. *Opening prayer:*

*Lead us by your Spirit, O God, to value what you value.*

*and to live our lives reflecting those values.*

*Shepherd our commitments,*

*that they may reflect your purposes in and through our lives.*

*Show us when our values are misguided,*

*and move us to correct our ways.*

*In the name of +Jesus, Amen.*

4. *Let's review our agenda together:*

Welcome, Introductions, Prayer, Roles

Part 1: Consider experiences of Church

Part 2: Discover our Values

Part 3: Discern our Core Values

Part 4: Identify Obstacles and Opportunities

5. *We need a couple of volunteers:*

- **Time monitor:** Who will help us monitor our time during our process? Times are noted in purple in this guide.



- **Recorder:** Who is willing to capture our shared wisdom on the poster during our conversation? Directions for what to write are noted in green in this guide.
  - *Before proceeding to Part 1: The recorder notes the following in the “Participants” box:*
    - *Context of Conversation, i.e. Youth Group, Council, Bible Study, etc.*
    - *Number of participants*
    - *Age-range of participants*
6. *This resourcing conversation has two goals:*
- *To engage together in our shared call as the people of God*
  - *To share and collect the wisdom of those gathered today about the values pertaining to church that are held by people in this congregation or ministry*
  - *Today’s conversation will take about 60 – 90 minutes. The practice works best when it is intentionally kept moving.*

## **Part 1: Experiences of Church**

7. *We begin our conversation today with personal reflection. Take 3 minutes to reflect silently upon the following: Think of an experience from your own life when church was everything that you imagine it is supposed to be. What was happening in this experience? What feelings does this experience bring to mind? What values did this experience honor?*
- *Time monitor sets timer for 3 minutes*
8. *When the timer rings: Consider the experience that came to mind for you. If you are willing to share the feelings and values associated with that experience, please do so now. Please know that sharing is optional.*
- *Recorder writes the emotions shared on the left side of the box labeled “emotions.”*
  - *Give 5-7 minutes for sharing*
9. *For the next part of our reflection, take 3 minutes to reflect silently upon an opposite experience. Think of an experience from your own life when church was everything that you imagine it is not supposed to be. What was*



*happening in this experience? What feelings does this experience bring to mind? What values were missing or being suppressed by this experience?*

- *Time monitor sets timer for **3 minutes***

*10. When the timer rings: Consider the experience that came to mind for you. If you are willing to share the feelings associated with that experience and the values missing from the experience, please do so now. Please remember that sharing is optional.*

- *Recorder writes the emotions shared in the right side of the box labeled “emotions.”*
- *Give 5-7 minutes for sharing*



## **Part 2: Discovering our Values**

*11. With these experiences and feelings in mind, we are now going to think together about our values for church as we experience it in and through our congregations.*

- *You each have in front of you a pack of post-it notes.*
- *On each post-it-note, write one value that you have for church.*
- *Another way to think about values is to think about what is important to you. So, on each post-it-note write **one thing that is important to you about church.***
- *There are no wrong answers.*
- *Your “important things” can be as tangible as your building, as intangible as something you believe, and anything in between.*
- *Remember - one important thing about church per note.*
- *Fill as many notes as you can.*
- *We have 5 minutes for this exercise.*
- *Time monitor sets the timer for **5 minutes***
- *If everyone is done early, move on to the next step.*



12. *When the timer rings: We are now going to take our notes and spread them out on the table.*

13. *Once the notes are spread out on the table: We are going to look for ideas that are related in some way, and place them together into 5-10 related groupings.*

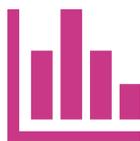
- *It is very important that no one talk during this step.*
- *We will take turns, two people at a time.*
- *Each person will move three notes to group like ideas together.*
- *Once you have moved three notes, step aside, so that someone else can have a turn.*
- *We will repeat the process until all notes are grouped.*
- *It's okay to have "singles" that don't seem to fit with a group. Place them in a group of their own.*
- *It is also okay to move a note someone else has already moved.*
- *If a note seems to belong in two groups, make a second note.*
- *The focus should be on looking for and grouping related ideas.*
- *Remember that these are "groupings."*
- *Do not place the notes in any order or determine categories or headings in advance.*
- *We will take 5 minutes to do this.*
- *Time monitor sets the timer for **5 minutes**.*
- *If you are done early, move on to the next step.*

14. *Once the notes are all grouped with any singles placed in their own group: We are now going to discuss what we see and identify a central theme for each grouping. If we need to move some ideas around as we discuss, that is okay.*

- *To help us think of a theme for each group, look for a note in each group that captures the meaning of the group.*
- *We will take 10 minutes to do this.*
- *Begin with the grouping on the left, and repeat the process until each grouping has a heading.*
- *Time monitor sets the timer for **10 minutes**.*
- *Recorder writes the theme for each grouping on a new note and places it at the top of the grouping.*



- *If you are done early, move on to the next step.*



### **Part 3: Discerning our Core Values**

15. *Once each group has a theme: Look at the themes we have identified. These are what we have named today as values about church. All of these values are important. We know the list is incomplete, but this is our important wisdom we bring to the conversation today. We are now going to have an open conversation so that we can rank these values in priority order. We will take 10 minutes for this conversation.*

- *Time monitor sets the timer for **10 minutes**.*
- *Discuss the themes “popcorn style.” If needed, the questions below can help guide the conversation.*
- *What strikes you as important about each theme?*
- *What criteria are you using to determine importance?*
- *What implications does each value have for who we are called to be?*
- *What implications does each value have for what we are called to do?*
- *What would be missing if a particular value was left out?*
- *Which values are essential and represent the church’s primary way of being?*

16. *When the timer rings: Remembering that each value is important, we are going to rank them in priority order by voting. With your marker, place dots by the top two values for you.*

- *Count the dots by each value. Rank them in order. The top two are the core values from this exercise.*
- *The recorder writes the themes in priority order in the “Central Themes” box.*



17. *We are now going to give some depth to our top two values by writing core value statements.*

- *We want the statements to be rich and meaningful and if possible, to inspire.*
- *Look at the words in the grouping for each value, and use those words to help craft a statement.*
- *EX: Let's say we've identified a core value of worship to represent others values like the Holy Communion, Holy Baptism, preaching, sing-able music, and prayers that come from the heart. Your values statement might be: "Worship: to faithfully proclaim the Gospel through the sacraments, preaching, congregational song, and meaningful prayers."*
- *Not all words in each grouping will fit in each statement, but we want to capture the spirit of the grouping with our statements.*
- *Once we have written your statements, we will decide if they are actual values (values the church lives out in daily life and ministry), aspirational values (values the church hopes to live out in daily life and ministry) or both. The recorder notes this as indicated on the poster.*
- *We have 10 minutes to write our statements.*
- *The time monitor sets the timer for **10 minutes**.*
- *The recorder writes the statements in priority order in the "Core Values" box, and notes whether they are actual, aspirational, or both.*
- *If you are done early, move on to the next step.*



## Part 4: Identifying Obstacles and Opportunities

18. *After the core values are written on the poster: Our final task is to note some obstacles and opportunities related to each of our core values.*

- *What obstacles and opportunities does each core value present?*
- *What obstacles and opportunities do we encounter when seeking to live out these two values?*
- *We have 5 minutes to consider these questions.*
- *The time monitor sets the time for **5 minutes**.*
- *The recorder takes notes in the box as the discussion occurs*

*The CVM team will gather all completed posters.*

*At the designated time, the posters will be put on display for the entire congregational consideration and discussion.*

- *All congregational participants are invited to place a sticker by your **top two core values**.*
- *CVM team compiles and shares results*

