



## What's next?

Now that you've seen what can happen when a congregation focuses on empowering all God's saints for ministry in daily life, you might be wondering where to turn or what to do next. We offer the following suggestions:

### **First of all, you don't need to wait to start**

It's true: Changing the culture of a congregation so that it focuses on equipping and sending the saints into the world is a paradigm shift. Truly changing the culture of a congregation will require the leadership to be in agreement and completely focused on making the necessary changes. But don't let that stop you. You can take some initial steps right now:

- Decide whether bridging the gap between what we do in our congregations and what we do in our daily lives is a core challenge for your congregation. If it is, then make the commitment to making this *the* primary challenge for all of your ministry to address. Trust that God will be in the journey of addressing this challenge, that it will be a life-giving and energizing, and trust that change will come over time.
- As you work to build consensus, take the first steps by affirming people for the work they do through which God is active. Simply let people know that they are already involved in ministry, every day of their lives.
- While you're working toward a new vision for the church, start asking people what is happening in the places where they spend their time, who is there, and what God might be doing in their midst. Then reply, "That's an important ministry. How can we equip you for that ministry? How can we pray for you?" Seeing such stories as signs of Christ's work in and among us can and will show us the way forward.
- You don't need to explain why you've changed; just invite people to explore how God is at work in all of life.
- You can start this work today.

### **This work is both utterly simple and dauntingly complex**

Focusing the church's mission on our scattering as much as our gathering is a paradigm shift that requires focused attention over a long period of time; it is not "just another program," a short-term series, or one person's pet project. This paradigm shift will require significant changes in the way we train our leaders, plan for the future, and report on the past. Refer back to [Jason Van Hunnik's article](#) for more information.

The paradigm shift can begin by changing the way we talk about what is important. It has been said that when we count things that matter, it matters what we count. Focusing on our scattering will involve learning to report on (and thereby value) what God in Christ is already doing in and through our everyday lives. In such an approach we focus on the ways that the Spirit is already at work in our gathering to equip the saints for ministry, and in our scattering for the benefit of our neighbor. This turns our perspective outward instead of inward. It takes the burden off pastors and staff to deliver programs and ministry. This means we no longer have to ask people to do something more or give something more. Instead of perpetually seeking something that will renew our life together, it

refocuses our attention on Christ's already abundant activity in our lives for the benefit of our neighbors.

### **Focus on the big picture and the long-term**

The harsh truth is that the autoimmune disorder of the Body of Christ<sup>1</sup> will seek to kill off any effort to change the culture of the congregation. This paradigm shift will not be accomplished with a six-week emphasis. In order to make the shift, leaders will need to be clear about the overarching issues that we face (see Jason Van Hunnik's article, above), create plans to address those issues and teach people new understandings, and commit to the long-term.

### **You need the support of others**

The scope of this work, and the challenges involved in overcoming decades of institutional conditioning, points to the need for the help of others who are doing similar work. Form a colleague group, either locally or electronically, and support one another. If you're on Facebook, search for "ELCA Life of Faith" and join our group. Don't try to do this work alone.

### **Synodical and denominational leaders**

While the bulk of the paradigm shift will be done in congregations, the role of bishops and assistants, DEMs, and churchwide staff is critical. Introducing the concepts of the Life of Faith Initiative to your constituents is a critical first step, followed by support for their work. Invite a Life of Faith advocate in to present and/or consult with your leaders. Begin to use the language of vocation, the gathered/scattered church, and/or ministry in daily life.

One critical need from denominational leaders is to find additional ways to measure our ministry and mission. Reporting only the numbers of participants in congregational programs or dollars on hand serves to support the status quo: assuring the vitality of our institutions. Finding ways to measure and report on the astonishing variety of ministries that are already taking place in the lives of all God's saints will be a welcome relief to pushing for new ways to increase worship attendance or get people to participate in church programs.

### **Check out the resources that are available**

Find out what others are doing by participating in our Facebook group. Go to our website, <http://lifeoffaith.info> and dive into the Resources page. When you experiment with changes, whether they work or not, share your experiences and what you learned with the Facebook group.

### **As you work on this paradigm shift, watch for these indicators<sup>2</sup>**

*LEADERS will have changed when...*

- We have concern not only for the general health of our congregations, but find ourselves asking pertinent questions and foster congregational life that enables everyone to live the faith in the world.
- We constantly want to learn more about the situations that people are facing in their everyday lives.
- We recognize that ministry doesn't always happen in or through the gathered church, and we verbalize support and appreciation of how God is at work in the world.
- We recognize and live with the tension of wanting and needing to recruit people for gathered church activities and programs, and supporting people in the demands of their daily lives, recognizing that they are not mutually exclusive.

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1. Dwight DuBois, *The Scattering: Imagining a Church that Connects Faith and Life*, 78-81.

2. Adapted from Neil Hudson, *Imagine Church: Releasing Whole-Life Disciples*, 158-163.

- Similarly, we consider whether our “competition” for people’s time is the best way to accomplish our mission. Perhaps we need to cut back on activities that take people out of the world?
- We intentionally reflect on how our preaching and teaching are relevant and grounded in specific situations in our members’ lives.
- We grow into our identity not just as disciple-makers, but as disciples. We increasingly recognize that our ministry extends beyond what we do in the gathered church to what we do as spouses, parents, friends, and citizens.

*CONGREGATIONS will have changed when...*

- Conversations begin to change. Small talk will move to significant conversations about the rough and tumble of life. Seemingly small conversations become crucial reminders that we are called to make a difference wherever God places us.
- People see that gathered church activities are designed to help them see God’s hand at work in all we do, provide a wider perspective on the world, and provide insight into the ways God is at work through us for the life of the world.
- We regularly and publicly hear stories of ordinary lives and how God is at work in us for our neighbors.
- People begin to know one another better and are prepared to be more supportive of one another.
- People who join from another congregation will be able to recognize that they have come into a place with a very different culture.

*INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS will have changed when...*

- We embrace and are able to talk about our everyday contexts as settings for God’s work.
- Our prayers are less defensive (“Lord, get me through the day”) and more desirous of discerning God’s presence and activity (“Lord, what are you trying to do through me?”)
- We have a new understanding about why our everyday activities and relationships matter to God.