Learning Module:

Meeting our Neighbors
Building Better Relationships with our Community

Beta Vitality Process for Congregations and Leaders
“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus speaking in Mark 12:31

When a church is started, it gathers together people from its neighborhood and community. Over time, it’s easy for a church to spend more and more time on the people already inside the church and less and less time with people outside the church. This can lead to a church not being very deeply engaged with its neighbors, its neighborhood, or its community. Every so often, a church needs to focus on re-meeting, re-learning, and intentionally re-engaging its community. The first step in this re-engagement is meeting the neighbors and entering into fuller relationships with the people in a church’s neighborhood, community, or mission field.

Coaching Questions for conversation:

• Tell a story of when someone was great neighbor to you. What did they do? Why did they do it? How did it make your feel?
• Tell a story of a time when you felt like you were being a good neighbor.
• What makes for a good neighbor in your community?
• What was it like to meet one of your new neighbors for the first time?
• Who are your church’s neighbors? What are they like? What do you think they think about your church?

Who is my neighbor?

In Luke 10:25-37, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan as a lesson on what it means to love your neighbor as you love yourself. This story is a little shocking, because the people Jesus was teaching didn’t often consider Samaritans to be their neighbors. They more often thought of them as enemies. Often the first step for a church in meeting its neighbors is to learn more about the church’s neighbors, neighborhood, and community. This can help a church put aside unfounded assumptions and misunderstandings that might be creating a subtle barrier between the church and its community.

Video 1: Who are the people in your neighborhood? – Curtis Brown

• Why is it important for a church to know its neighbors?
• Who are a church’s neighbors?
• How can a church learn more about the people in its neighborhood?

This might be a good place to review the information your church gathered for the Mission Field Demographics self-assessment process. You can find out how to gather this information at www.churchvitalityprocess.org/mission-field-demographics. Pay special attention to the discussion questions at the end of the self-assessment.
Coaching Questions for conversation:

• How could your church learn more about the people who live in your neighborhood or community?
• What have you already learned about the people who live in your neighborhood?
• Who are the neighbors who live closest to your church? What are they like?
• Who are the neighbors who live closest to your home? What are they like?
• How do you think your neighbors are like the people who go to your church?
• How do you think your neighbors are different than the people who go to your church?
• How do you believe Jesus would answer if your church asked, “Who is my neighbor?”

How do you meet your neighbors?

Beyond learning about the people in their neighborhood, community, or mission field, churches can enter into deep and meaningful relationships and partnerships with their neighbors. These relationships open up the church to be changed by its neighbors and for the neighborhood to be blessed by God’s work through the church.

Video 2: How do we build relationships with our neighbors? – John Helmiere

• How can you first begin building relationships in a neighborhood?
• How do you deepen relationships into partnerships?
• How is a neighborhood changed by its relationships with a church?
• How is a church changed by its relationships with its neighbors?

Coaching Questions for conversation:

• How could your church begin building relationships with its neighbors?
• How could you begin building better relationships with your own neighbors?
• When have you experienced a friendship that built into a partnership?
• When has your church been a good partner to another community group?
• Why would knowing your neighbors be important to your church?
• What would your church look like if it had deeper relationships with your neighbors, community, or mission field?
• What difference would it make to your community if your church were more engaged in deeper relationships with its neighbors?
• What difference would it make in your church? In your own life?
• What could be good first steps in deepening friendships with your church’s neighbors?
Strategies for change

Vision – How would knowing our neighbors make us a better church?

Change – What difference would more fully engaging our community make in our church?

Strategy – What is our plan for meeting more or our neighbors?

Evaluation – How will we know if we’re meeting more neighbors and more fully engaging our community?

Resources for further study:

Books & Video:
- The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community by Paul Sparks & Tim Soerens
- Neighborhood Mapping: How to Make Your Church Invaluable to the Community by John Fuder & Ray Bakke
- Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood by Alan Roxburgh
- Finding Jesus on the Metro and Other Surprises Doing Church in a New Day by Paul Nixon

Websites:
- www.missioninsite.com - demographic information for your area (check with your denominational office to see if your church already has access) For Pacific Northwest UMC, use www.pnwumc.org/missioninsite
- www.epicentergroup.org/cultural-relevance/community-listening-tools - resources for engaging community

Video Presenters:

Curtis Brown is a pastor, church planter, consultant and coach who has worked with hundreds of church leaders across the United States. Curtis currently serves as Director of Faith Community Development for the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Methodist Church.

John Helmiere is the founding minister and convener of Valley & Mountain, a United Methodist faith community in Seattle.

Using this Learning Module:

This learning module is designed for use as part of larger Beta Vitality Process, focused on increasing the vitality of a local congregation. It is best used as part of a 2-hour session conducted on-site with a team of leaders from a local church facilitated by a coach.

Step 1: Coaching Check-In with group
Coach centers group, checks in on progress & established plans

Step 2: Learning Module
Using videos & written materials, church engages 45-60 minute training session on “quick-win” for vitality

Step 3: Identification of key change
Coach leads process where church identifies desired changes based on learning in Learning Module

Step 4: Planning strategy for change
Coach leads plan development to realize desired change

Step 5: Mobilizing implementation
Local church team commits resources for immediately implementing plans over next 4-6 weeks.

Who should be involved and invited to use this learning module?

Successful use of this learning module will result in immediate implementation of plans to engage the strategic changes envisioned by the participants. Therefore, you will want to invite all and any church leaders who will have insight, energy, responsibility, or interest in those strategic changes. For this learning module, you may want to specifically involve:

- The Beta Team
- The Church Council
- The Lay Leader
- The Pastor
- Mission & outreach leaders
- Evangelism & marketing leaders
- Young people in your church
- Community leaders in your church
- Church neighbors in your church