

# Notes

# reimagining church



## Questions to Consider

- What did you hear that either challenged or sparked something in the talk?
- Where are the “walls” in your context? Who’s on the other side?
- When have you experienced belonging or exclusion in a faith space?
- What does belonging require?
- Who gets to define neighbor?
- What does it mean to be transformed by proximity?

This activity helps map the people and relationships that exist in and around ministry or community settings.

It surfaces who is centered, who is peripheral, and who might be missing altogether, so that we can begin to move more intentionally toward deeper, more inclusive relationships.

# who is my neighbor



## Instructions

### Draw Your Map

In the center circle, write “Your Name / Your Faith Community.”  
Then, moving outward, fill in each layer:

- Circle 1: Core Relationships

Who is closest to your ministry?

Think: staff, volunteers, leadership, consistent members, “insiders”

- Circle 2: Engaged Participants

Who shows up regularly but isn't in leadership?

Think: people who attend worship, receive services, or come to events

- Circle 3: Peripheral or Undervoiced Relationships

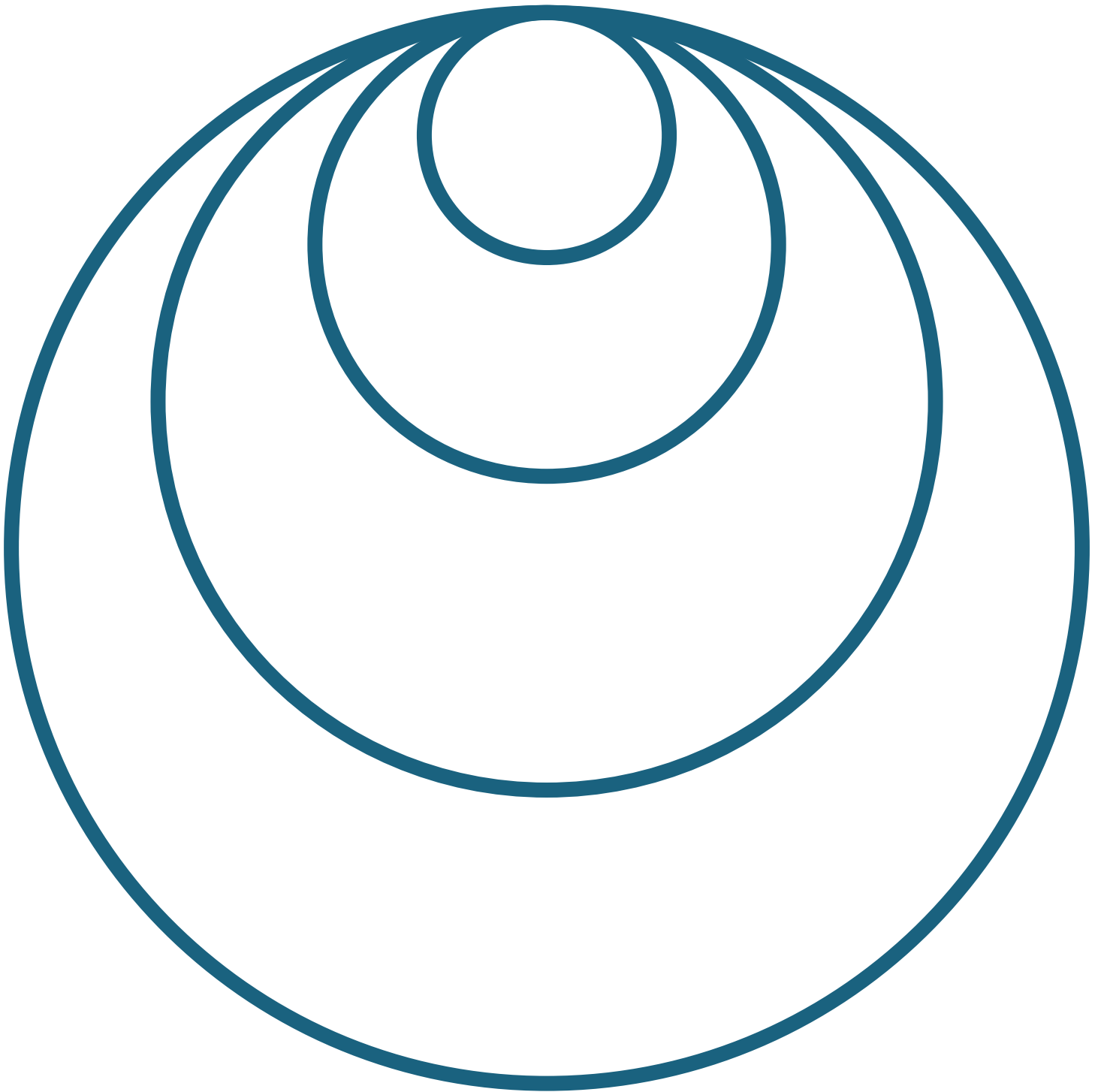
Who is affected by your work but may not have voice or decision-making power?

Think: neighbors, support staff, service recipients, folks with lived experience

- Circle 4: Absent but Impacted

Who isn't in your space but should be?

Think: youth, people without transportation, folks harmed by church history, non-English speakers



## Questions to Consider

- What did you notice or feel as you filled in your circles?
- Where do you see strong relationship? Where is there distance?
- Who is missing, and why might that be?
- What stories are being centered, and what stories are left out?
- What would it take to move someone one circle closer?

# Purpose

This activity invites participants to engage real-life ministry scenarios that challenge comfort zones, expose assumptions, and stretch our understanding of radical hospitality, naming what a shift from “ministry to” to “ministry with” might look like.

# reimagining the table

## Questions to Consider

Use these questions to guide your conversation after reading each scenario:

### Observation

- What stands out to you in this scenario?
- What assumptions are showing up (from the church, from participants, or from you)?
- What unspoken rules or norms are being enforced?

### Discernment

- Who is being centered in decision-making?
- What does it mean to prioritize dignity here?
- What would Jesus at the table do or say?

### Action

- What might it look like to slow down, stay proximate, and listen?
- How can we design for belonging, not just behavior management?
- What would a “next faithful step” look like in this situation?

# Scenarios

## The Meal Table Gets Messy

Your church recently began offering a weekly free community meal in your fellowship hall. The original intention was to “meet the neighbors” and offer food security. As word spread, more and more unhoused neighbors began attending, some bringing shopping carts and backpacks, others asking for seconds, taking food to go, or sitting alone for long periods of time.

Some volunteers feel overwhelmed. A few have started asking for stricter rules or even suggesting a “guest-only” meal without church members. One congregant says: “This isn’t what we signed up for—it doesn’t feel like our space anymore.”

Your task: What does it look like to move from a posture of control to one of welcome and dignity?

## The Disruptive Worshipper

A neighbor who lives in a nearby shelter has started attending worship services. She arrives early, is sometimes loud during the sermon, and occasionally asks people for money after church. At a recent service, she interrupted the prayers to share something personal and painful, and some members looked visibly uncomfortable.

Afterward, several people suggested that she be redirected to pastoral care or told to be quiet during worship. Others worry that if the interruptions continue, newer visitors won’t come back.

Your task: How might your community practice inclusion that doesn’t rely on silence or conformity?

## The Complicated Teen

A high school student begins attending a weekly Bible study. They show up inconsistently, sometimes vaping in the parking lot and challenging theological ideas in a way that throws the facilitator off. They dress in ways that don’t conform to the church’s norms, and when asked to help clean up, they roll their eyes and walk out.

Some adults think the teen is being disrespectful. Others believe they are testing boundaries to see if the church is truly a place they can belong. One leader says, “Maybe this just isn’t the right space for them right now.”

Your task: How might your group reimagine the space to hold complexity without controlling it?

# From Transaction to Relationship

## Ministry To

We assume what people need

Programs are designed for the community

Volunteers are heroes or saviors

Needs define people

We offer services

Emphasis on efficiency outcomes

One-way giving (us to them)

We hold all the power and control

"They should be grateful" mindset

Outreach is based on fixing or saving

Worship and community have preconditions (sobriety, behavior, dress, etc.)

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## Ministry With

We ask and listen first

Programs are co-created with the community

Everyone has gifts to offer

People are whole and complex

We build relationships

Emphasis on connection and trust

Mutual exchange (we receive, too)

We share the power and decision-making

"We are honored to be together" mindset

Presence is rooted in mutual transformation

All are welcomed as they are, without prerequisites

## 1. Listen Deeply and Without Agenda

- Sit with someone's story longer than feels comfortable.
- Let go of the need to fix or respond.
- Treat each person as a storyteller, not a case or project.
- "Let every person be quick to listen, slow to speak..." – James 1:19

## 2. Assume Less, Ask More

- Don't decide what someone needs without them.
- Use curiosity instead of assumptions: "What would be most helpful right now?"
- Recognize that even the most well-intentioned assumptions can cause harm.
- Practice: When you catch yourself labeling someone, pause and ask, "What else could be true?"

## 3. Create Space for Voice and Choice

- Offer real choices, not just options within limits.
- Invite people into leadership, storytelling, feedback, and co-creation.
- Don't just include voices, center and amplify them.
- People with lived experience should be shaping the ministries that claim to serve them.

## 4. Prioritize Dignity Over Control

- Let people eat when they're hungry. Let them rest if they're tired.
- Treat "rules" as tools for safety, not mechanisms of power.
- Offer hospitality that doesn't shame or patronize.
- Hospitality is not charity. It is kinship.

## 5. Stay Proximate and Open to Transformation

- Draw near to pain, discomfort, and difference.
- Keep showing up even when it's messy, inconvenient, or slow.
- Let yourself be changed by the people you claim to serve.
- "You can't transform a system from a distance. You have to be close enough to be changed by it." (adapted from Bryan Stevenson)

# 5 practices of radical hospitality

# Guided Action Plan:

## Moving Toward More Dignified and Inclusive Ministry

“What’s one next faithful step I can take to expand love for neighbor in ways that are bold, faithful, and deeply connected to the Gospel?”

### Step 1: Diagnose Your Default Posture

Use the “Ministry TO vs Ministry WITH” chart to reflect honestly on your current ministry mindset. Mark the column that best describes your team or context, or place yourself somewhere in between.

Reflection: Where did you mark most? What surprised or challenged you?

### Step 2: Apply the Five Practices

Fill in the blanks below to reflect and plan for each of the five practices of radical hospitality.

#### 1. Listen Deeply

- One place I need to slow down and truly listen:
- A person or group whose story I've overlooked:

#### 2. Assume Less, Ask More

- One assumption I need to challenge:
- A better question I could ask instead:

#### 3. Create Space for Voice and Choice

- One decision we typically make for others that we could make with them:
- How can we invite others to shape the work?

#### 4. Prioritize Dignity Over Control

- A policy, rule, or behavior we use to maintain control:
- How could that shift to prioritize dignity?

#### 5. Stay Proximate

- Where am I being called to “stay close,” even when it's uncomfortable?
- How will I resist the temptation to retreat or fix?



### Step 3: Your Next Faithful Step

Now, synthesize your reflections into a clear, practical commitment. What is one concrete step you will take in the next 30 days to move from ministry to to ministry with?

Who else needs to be involved in this shift?

How will you remain accountable to this shift? (e.g. follow-up, team check-in, journal, mentor)

What scares you most about this shift?

### Bonus Step: Take It To Your Team

If you're part of a team, consider bringing these questions into your next meeting:

- Who gets to shape what our ministry looks like?
- How do we define success, and who defines it?
- What are we willing to let go of in order to make more space for belonging?
- What assumptions are baked into our outreach, programming, or worship?

### Other Notes & Takeaways

**guided  
action  
plan**