

Congregational Formation Process



Year One Goal

Congregations are able to articulate, contextualize, and embed the desired culture change that will allow Life of Faith principles to flourish.

Formation Principles

- Begin and conclude each session with worship and prayer.
- Acknowledge the unique context and circumstances of every congregation.
- Work toward context-specific goals and approaches to be developed by every congregation.
- Embed the five affirmations of baptism promises throughout the formation process and as an ongoing practice for congregation members and the congregation as a whole.
- Provide recommended resources for worship and prayer, including materials from the ELW.

Process & Timeline

Late Winter 2023

Train the rostered leaders in selected congregations, followed by written guidance regarding the selection of their Guiding Team, and suggestions for team building.

Ideally the team should be composed of five or six members who are able to connect with as many members and ministries of the congregation as possible. A pastor/staff person and a council liaison should be part of the team.

Members of the Guiding Team should be willing to:

- commit to personal growth;
- engage in culture change and innovation without generating systemic anxiety;
- work with others, listens deeply, honor, respect, and encourage one another as a member of the body of Christ; and
- commit to a Guiding Team covenant.

Spring 2023

First meeting of all participants:

- Introduce the leaders, participants, and coaches.
- Hear from the experience of Westwood Lutheran Church.
- Overview of the initiative and Holy Innovations Project.
- A theological foundation for the initiative.
- Introduce the team building activity (see next step).

The synodical meeting will be in person; the cohort of the willing meeting will be by Zoom.

May–June 2023

- Conduct first survey (see below, under Evaluation)
- Coaches communicate with participating congregations:
 - ◇ Introduce selves to pastor
 - ◇ Confirm date for Formation Retreat
 - ◇ Answer questions and share the role of coach
- Begin reading assigned portions of *The Scattering* and *Currents in Theology and Mission* articles: <http://currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents/issue/view/55>

Summer 2023

The Guiding Team is joined by their coach, designated synod leadership team member, and Life of Faith team members. Components of the team formation begin with individual work:

- **Who am I?** (2.5–3 hours pre-recorded facilitated retreat)
Baptismal Identity (intro 5 Gifts), Dependable Strengths, Values
<http://nswi.org/leadership/spiritual-wellbeing>
- **Whose am I?** (1 hour, pre-recorded)
Writing a spiritual autobiography begins following the “Who am I?” section (above) and continues, ongoing, throughout the first year

The Guiding Team makes arrangements to distribute a baseline questionnaire to congregational members. This questionnaire will gather information about individual and collective faith practices as well as language used in the congregation. The request letter/email will be co-signed by a congregational leader and a member of the Guiding Team. All congregational members will be encouraged to respond. Responses for each congregation will be summarized and provided to guiding teams as a resource for project development.

September–October 2023

- Life of Faith leaders provide an extended introduction (three 60-90 minute meetings over the course of several weeks) to the initiative and the Holy Innovations process.

A separate document, “Extended Fall Introduction,” will provide details about these sessions.

The schedule for these three sessions is: (schedule may be amended)

Coaches gather with Guiding Teams watch/discuss Session 1 between Sept 3–20
ALL Guiding Teams gather (coaches optional) September 21, 7:00 p.m. Central

Coaches gather with Guiding Teams to watch/discuss Session 2 between Sept 22–Oct 4
ALL Guiding Teams gather (coaches optional) October 5, 7:00 p.m. Central

Coaches gather with Guiding Teams watch/discuss Session 3 between Oct 6–18
ALL Guiding Teams gather (coaches optional) October 19, 7:00 p.m. Central

(These sessions will be recorded for teams that are running behind schedule.)

October–December 2023

- The guiding teams focus on “What does it mean to be a new creation in Christ?” Guiding teams review aha’s from their individual work, sharing and relationship building.
- Guiding teams discern **Who are we together?**, focused particularly on “What has brought you to this moment in time? What makes you ready for the Holy Innovations project?” Which leads to...
 - a congregational autobiography/timeline of who they are and what God might be calling them to be, particularly in light of what they have learned so far.
 - a guiding theological/vision statement for the project, that frames the central challenge(s) and benefits that the Life of Faith Initiative reveals for their congregation.
- Life of Faith leaders introduce available resources (see www.lifeoffaith.info).
- Life of Faith leaders offer possible ideas and approaches for Years Two and Three.
- Guiding teams work with coaches to discern and draft objectives, goals, and strategies for their congregation.

- Objectives, goals, and strategies are finalized and ready for a kickoff as early in 2024 as possible. [Note: there is nothing preventing guiding teams from implementing helpful practices (e.g., reshaping worship language) before the kickoff.]

2024

- Guiding Team introduces the project to the congregation.
- Congregations begin to implement their plan.
- Coaches serve as accompaniment and accountability partners.
- Life of Faith leaders are available for consultation.
- DEMs and Synods accompany the congregations.

Late 2022

- Evaluate, adjust plan, and make adaptations for the coming year.
- Congregations celebrate accomplishments, revise previous plan, and establish new goals.

The Roles of Participants

Synodical Leadership Team:

- Synodical leaders participate in the congregational formation process to accompany their congregations, so that they are better able to act as mentors for the congregations alongside the coaches.
- Appropriate synod leadership team members schedule and participate in periodic synodical cohort meetings.
- Synod leaders listen, communicate, and work toward dissemination of the initiative within the synod and beyond (other synods).

Coaches:

- Provide coaching to congregational Guiding Team (and others as necessary).
- Participate in the synod cohort meetings.
- Participate in Coaching support huddles led by Tammy.

Congregational Guiding Team:

- Creates a cohesive group that leads the congregation through culture change to implement the paradigm shift.
- Works closely with the congregational council and other leaders of the congregation to explain the process, the challenges, and trains them for their participation in the work. The Guiding Team will not only report to/work through the council, but individuals on the team should work with ministry leaders and groups throughout the congregation to employ Life of Faith principles as broadly as possible. This project is not one small group's passion, nor is it an addition to the what the congregation already does. Ultimately, the goal is that eventually there will be no part of the congregation, including the budget, that will not be integrated in this work.

Life of Faith Team:

- Provides the initial training and formation.
- Provides guidance through the first six months (primarily in synod cohort meetings) as guiding teams develop their vision statement, goals, and strategies.

- Supports and consults with congregational guiding teams (as needed) through the 3-year process of transformation, especially in the synodical cohort meetings or in periodic emails and/or phone calls.
- Will explore the possibility of a post-epidemic in-person gathering or two if conditions allow.

Evaluation:

- Congregations fill out a survey early in 2023 and annually after that.
- Congregation leaders provide access to written communications throughout the three years.
- Congregations make members of the congregational leadership and membership available for one-on-one interviews.