



# DAWNINGS

## LEADERSHIP RETREAT





Dawnings is a story-based approach for personal and congregational discernment. Reimagined by Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) and rereleased in 2023, Dawnings has catalyzed transformation in congregations for over a decade.

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# WHY DAWNINGS? WHY NOW?

During my own Dawnings experience several years ago, God led me to words from Isaiah that I have returned to regularly. Perhaps especially during the dark days of the pandemic, I would read and remember:

*This is what God says,  
the God who builds a road right through the ocean,  
who carves a path through pounding waves,  
The God who summons horses and chariots and armies—  
they lie down and then can't get up;  
they're snuffed out like so many candles:  
"Forget about what's happened;  
don't keep going over old history.  
Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new.  
It's bursting out! Don't you see it? (Isaiah 43:16-19, The Message)*

These last two lines are both encouragement and command. The former encourages us to remember that God is still in control. The latter reminds us of our responsibility to notice and join God in doing something brand new.

Dawnings is a congregational resource that helps you accomplish both of these things. By leaning into a spiritual discernment process through listening and responding to stories, your congregation will open itself to its place in God's sacred story for the community.

Congregational postures of prayer and curiosity cultivate a sense of calling, not just for the congregation, but for individuals as well. What better way to "be alert, be present," and to be a part of the "something brand-new" God is doing!

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde reminds us,  
*"Veil after veil of thin dusky gauze is lifted, and by degrees the forms and colors of things are restored to them, and we watch the dawn remaking the world in its antique pattern."*

The words of the prophet Isaiah are a nod to the antique patterns of the activity of God. There is great hope that arrives with the dawn, where forms and colors are restored as the world comes back to light with the rising of the sun.

This is what Dawnings both calls and prepares a congregation to in its community. Let us remake the world, participating in God's active patterns, discovering new colors and forms for how God is calling our congregation to this moment.

Brian Foreman  
Coordinator of Congregational Ministries

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**PREPARING  
FOR THE  
DAWNINGS JOURNEY**





# Welcome to Dawnings!

For more than a decade, the Dawnings process has catalyzed transformation in congregations by bringing church leaders together to discern who and what God is calling their churches to be and do. CBF invites your congregation to share in this transformation for the sake of the world God so loves. As you consider the details that follow, we hope that God leads you to make the Dawnings journey.

## Scope and Sequence

When considering the Dawnings journey, it is important to understand its scope and sequence. Take a moment to consider the Dawnings journey outlined in the graphic below.





## Selecting a Leadership Team

The Dawnings journey in any congregation begins in earnest with the selection of a Dawnings Leadership Team. Your church's team can originate from an existing leadership group or form exclusively to facilitate Dawnings. Take care that the selection of your team is in keeping with the church's practice, process, and tradition for creating work groups. As you consider whom to recruit, note that the best prospects are those who demonstrate an appreciation for process, embody patience, wisdom, and endurance, as well as those who have a deep life wish for your congregation.

Most persons considering participation on the Dawnings Leadership Team want to know about the length of commitment. The answer depends on how the team designs the journey beyond the Leadership Retreat. Toward the end of the retreat, the team considers options for helping the greater congregation experience Dawnings. Though your church is free to design next steps for a Dawnings journey unique to your congregation, the material encourages the conducting of four "Congregational Sessions," explained in later paragraphs. The amount of time between these four sessions determines the length of your church's Dawnings journey. As a rule of thumb, ask team members to anticipate a commitment of six months to a year.

The church also needs to designate someone responsible for convening the Dawnings Leadership Team. Title that person according to your church's practice. i.e. chair, team leader, or convener.

## Selecting a Retreat Facilitator

Following the selection of the Dawnings Leadership Team and its chair, team leader, or convener, select someone to facilitate your church's first experience of Dawnings, the Leadership Team Retreat. There are at least a couple options for choosing a retreat facilitator. First, consider the new convener, but consider too others on the team more suited to this task. Consider the value of gifts and experience facilitating adult learning. The ideal facilitator is familiar with the idea and practice of adaptive leadership and is emotionally healthy enough to lead with an appropriate indifference.

## Connecting with a Dawnings Guide

Another option for someone to facilitate your church's Dawnings Leadership Retreat is a trained Guide. A Guide is available to facilitate your church's Leadership Retreat at no cost for a limited time. Guides work with the local church pastor or contact to plan and facilitate the Dawnings Leadership Retreat, as well as to offer a follow up phone conference. A Guide holds certification with CBF, helps connect your church to the growing Dawnings network, and shares a love for and experience in the local church. CBF designed Dawnings with local church leadership in mind. So, know that you can do this all by yourself! And that you don't have to! CBF is eager to partner with you on the journey. If at any point you want to request a Guide assignment, reach out at [dawnings@cbf.net](mailto:dawnings@cbf.net).

Whether your retreat facilitator is from within or an assigned Dawnings Guide, unless otherwise negotiated directly with that person, their responsibilities have concluded. Conclude well as you may want this person to play a role in however your church chooses to facilitate the upcoming Congregational Sessions.

## Congregational Sessions

Once your Dawnings Leadership Team completes the Leadership Retreat, the team plans and schedules four Congregational Sessions. The Sessions introduce the broader congregation to the Dawnings approach and give the Leadership Team an opportunity for discernment that comes through prayerful listening. Material provided in the Resource and Reference section of this booklet outlines the Congregational Sessions in such a way as to leave room for local input and contextual design. Session Six of the Leadership Retreat helps leadership anticipate and begin conversation about timely decisions. But it is helpful to think beyond the retreat event as you prepare for it. The Scope and Sequence at the start of this section is a helpful tool for planning.

Ideally, the first Congregational Sessions is scheduled within four to six weeks of the Leadership Retreat. Schedule subsequent sessions in consultation with those responsible for calendaring, considering the natural rhythms of your congregation's life together. Your team may choose to schedule one Congregational Sessions per month for four consecutive months. Or you may choose to schedule one every other month or even quarterly.

The sessions aim to clarify congregational calling through the gradual development of four interactive lenses: My Story, Our Church's Story, Our Community's Story, and God's Story. The Leadership Team has an opportunity at the conclusion of each Congregational Sessions to process elements of calling that come into focus. The team then uses what it learns and discerns toward forming, reforming, and transforming congregational life toward a more faithful being and doing.

We welcome your questions and insights. If you have questions or need assistance, don't hesitate to reach out at [dawnings@cbf.net](mailto:dawnings@cbf.net).

## Promotion

Once leadership schedules the Dawnings Leadership Retreat, schedule the later Congregational Sessions and begin promoting them. Be sure to communicate consistently the hope of strong participation from the congregation. This is a time to emphasize the significant role that the broader congregation plays in discerning the church's future and life together. Because everyone experiences calling, invite everyone to participate in the sharing and learning of another's story. Advertise the dates, times, and locations of the Congregational Sessions through all forms of church media. Utilize existing committees and teams to delegate related responsibilities and tasks for outreach, planning, preparation, and cleanup.

## Webpage Resources

The CBF Dawnings web address is [www.cbf.net/dawnings](http://www.cbf.net/dawnings). The landing page is the starting place for requesting material, assistance, or to request a Dawnings Guide assignment. Other resources available through the landing page include: an introductory video, a podcast interview with one of the Dawnings designers, as well as stories of churches that used Dawnings to discover who and what God called them to be and do in this unique season of ministry.





# THE LEADERSHIP RETREAT





The aim of the Dawnings Leadership Retreat is both formation and information. During the retreat, the Leadership Team begins learning about Dawnings conceptually by experiencing it personally. The retreat aims to form community among the team, teach the Dawnings approach and process, as well as to prepare the Leadership Team to present Dawnings to the larger church in a future series of gatherings called Congregational Sessions.

## Facilitation

The Leadership Retreat material assumes a retreat facilitator with some experience facilitating adult learning. In the event that a church opts to complete the retreat material in one gathering, two facilitators are better than one. In that scenario, two facilitators allow for alternating facilitation, as well as a more informed and insightful preparation. If your church is unable to provide such leadership at this time, consider the use of a Dawnings Guide in facilitating your church's retreat. Learn more at [www.cbf.net/dawnings](http://www.cbf.net/dawnings).

The retreat material includes six sessions, each lasting as much as one and a half hours. Each of the six sessions is broken down into several sections. Individual sections include numbered and bolded prompts that guide the retreat facilitator to preview, explain, invite, direct, affirm, or instruct participants. Facilitators should thoroughly familiarize themselves with the material prior to facilitation, feeling free to adapt the material to the needs and temperament of participants as necessary. If the facilitator has clarifying questions about a particular prompt or wants to workshop a plan or approach, she or he can reach out at [dawnings@cbf.net](mailto:dawnings@cbf.net) with questions or to schedule a time to talk.

## Location

A couple of activities in the retreat material make use of traditional spaces, the worship space, as well as the space between that location and the most common exit. As a result, hosting the retreat at your church is recommended. However, with a little imagination, any space that accommodates the larger retreat experiences and supports the comfort of participants will suffice.

The presentation of the retreat material occurs mostly in the same space. Consider the features of a comfortable space, keeping in mind the value of a good focal wall for the projection of digital content. Round tables are ideal, though not essential. Consider too the observance of meals and the flow of traffic when selecting and setting a space.

## Visuals

The use of a quality projector for the projection of the Dawnings slide deck will assist greatly in participants' understanding of the retreat material. Take steps to ensure a functional projector and computer prior to the event! Secure large self-adhesive tear-off sheets, a whiteboard, as well as appropriate markers.

## Christ Candle

Consider the use of a Christ Candle during your sessions. A Christ Candle is a tone-visual used to remind participants that they gather in Jesus' name and for his purposes. Feel free to use any candle for this purpose, but a nicer one is in order. When lighting it, call the room to attention, light the candle, and offer something like: "We light this candle as a reminder of Christ's promise and presence; that where two or more are gathered in Jesus' name, there he is too." Follow the lighting with a brief prayer of invocation beginning with, "Lord, Jesus, we gather in your name...."

## Meals

Meals accentuate Christian fellowship. Meals can play an important role in a Dawnings Leadership Retreat, as well as in the Congregational Sessions to follow. Aim to feed participants well while avoiding mental "comas" brought on by heavy, processed, and overly abundant options. Consider recruiting someone to coordinate all meals, snacks, and refreshments for the retreat. The care given to this logistic conveys the importance of the work.

## Schedule

Consider the options on the following page for scheduling your Dawnings Leadership Retreat, noting that the first option assumes the coverage of all sessions in a more traditional retreat format. A second option spreads the sessions out over several days or weeks. All options make use of "retreat" language, simply implying that your leadership set aside the time necessary to give their full attention to the material. Choose from among the options or design one that suits your team's needs and circumstances. Note that the options suggest up to one and a half hours for each session.

## OPTION ONE Weekend Retreat

Begins on Friday afternoon and concludes in the late afternoon on Saturday.

### Friday

3:30 Gathering  
4:00 Session One  
5:30 Meal  
6:00 Session Two  
7:30 Break  
7:45 Session Three  
9:15 Dismiss

### Saturday

8:30 Breakfast Fellowship  
9:00 Session Four  
10:30 Break  
10:45 Session Five  
12:15 Meal  
1:00 Session Six  
2:30 Dismiss

## OPTION TWO Three-Day Retreat

Begins on Sunday afternoon meeting on subsequent evenings as follows.

### Sunday

2:00 Gathering  
2:30 Session One  
4:00 Break  
4:15 Session Two  
5:45 Meal  
6:30 Dismiss

### Monday and Tuesday

4:30 Gathering  
5:00 Session Three/Five  
6:30 Meal  
7:00 Session Four/Six  
8:30 Dismiss

## OPTION THREE Multi-Week Event

The team meets at a fixed time over several weeks. It is recommended that the team meet at least weekly to sustain momentum. A team may decide to engage in two sessions per group meeting; if so, plan for four hours per gathering. Note the option of beginning or ending with a fellowship meal.

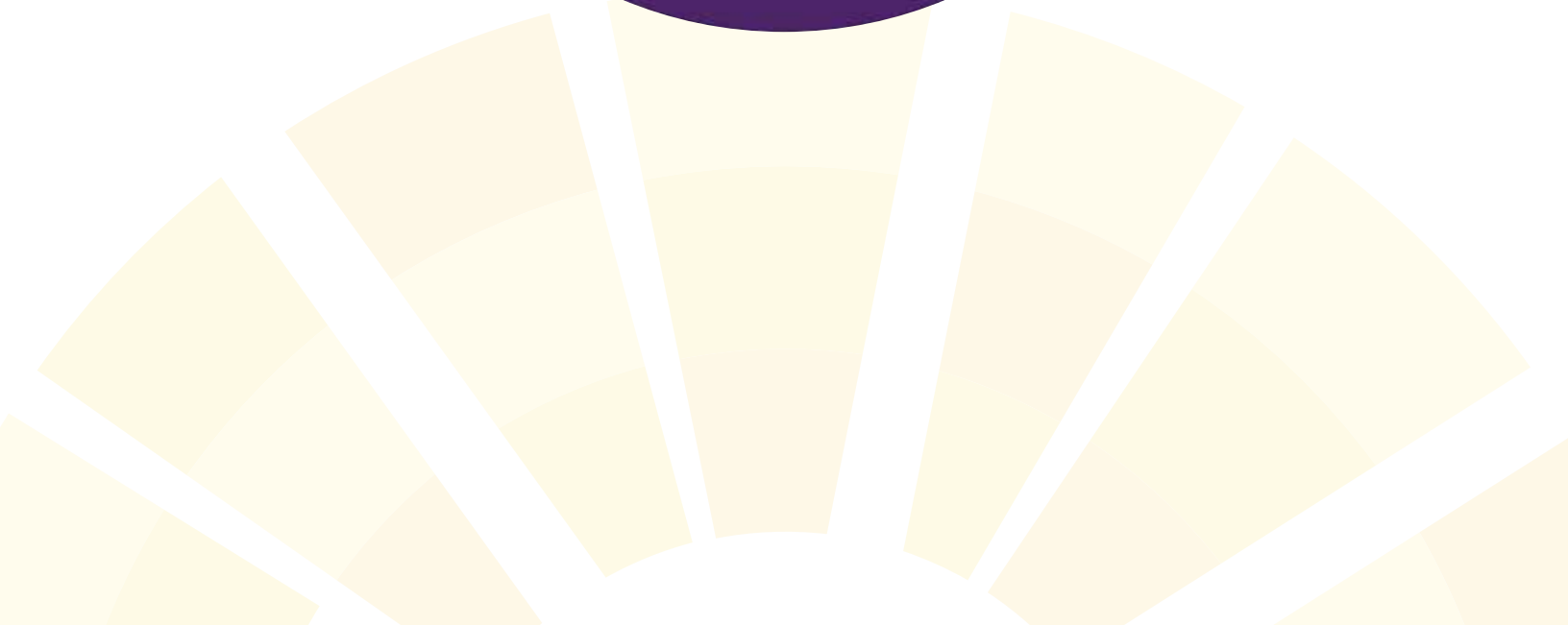
### *Weeks One, Two and Three*

Gathering/Gathering Meal  
Session One/Three/Five (90 minutes)  
Break (15 minutes)  
Session Two/Four/Six (90 minutes)  
Dismiss or Meal





# SESSION 1





# SESSION ONE: *Orientation*

## Session Overview

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Is it possible to experience orientation in a maze, confusion, or darkness? In this initial session, participants encounter introductory elements that orient the team to a potential new dawn for their church. After an initial time of community building, participants discover the capacity of prayer to reorient. In the remaining sections within this first session, participants define Dawnings through word and diagram, ponder the Foundational Assumption, and begin to pray the Essential Questions. Each element helps participants maintain orientation as they encounter new and challenging concepts in the five sessions that follow. Be prepared to call retreat participants back to these orienting elements as needed, especially the Essential Questions.

### Participants will explore:

- Breath Prayer
- Understanding Dawnings (definition and diagram)
- Foundational Assumption
- “Essential Questions”

### Materials Referenced in the Session

- Projector and computer
- Whiteboard and markers or large tear-off style sticky sheets
- Writing materials for participants, paper and pens or pencils for journaling
- Christ Candle (optional)
- Songsheet (optional); consult the list provided in the Resource and Reference section of this material
- Worksheet One | Church Maze

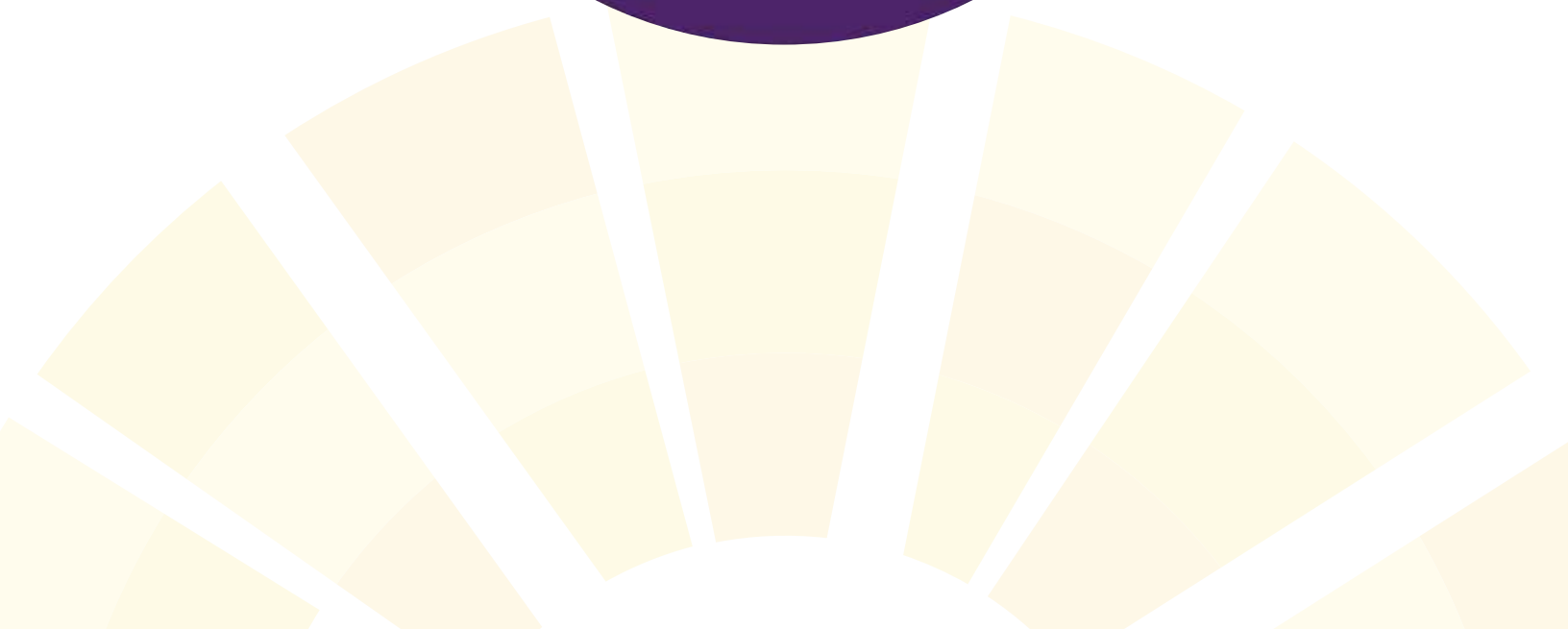
### Before the Session

- Delegate and confirm food logistics
- Review session material
- Determine whether to use pairs or triads
- Set up the room and test all equipment and software
- Make and place copies
- Anticipate potential distractions
- Arrive early and greet participants
- Songsheet (optional); consult the list provided in the Resource and Reference section of this material



If this session is the first in a regathering of your Leadership Team, consider starting the session with a review of the previous session by offering participants the opportunity to recall insights or discoveries made during the previous session, as well as related discoveries or realizations since that time.

# SESSION 2





# SESSION TWO: *Calling*

## Session Overview

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Session One used orientation to help participants locate a potential new dawn, Session Two introduces participants to that gift of God which dawns on us — calling. The session begins by revisiting the Dawnings diagram to illustrate an emerging clarity of call as the aim of Dawnings. Participants then experience a touchstone story about calling through Praying the Scripture. A broader interactive exploration of calling in Scripture follows, preparing participants to close the session with section reflections that lead them to consider the importance of calling in their church and personal life.

### Participants will explore:

- Praying the Scripture
- Jeremiah 18:1-6 as “touchstone”
- Calling in Scripture
- Calling in your church
- Calling in your story

### Materials Referenced in the Session

- Jeremiah 18:1-6
- Projector and computer
- Whiteboard and markers or large tear-off style sticky sheets
- Writing materials for participants, paper and pens or pencils for journaling
- Christ candle (optional)

### Before the Session

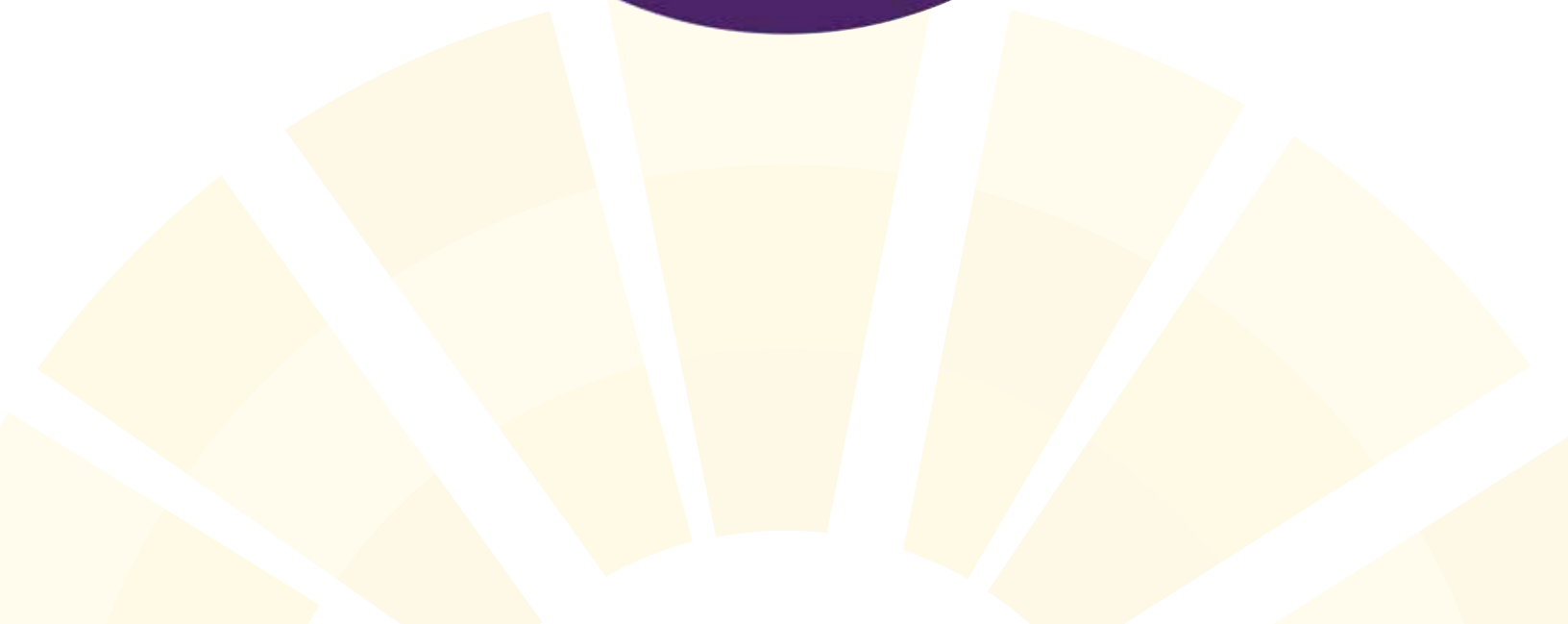
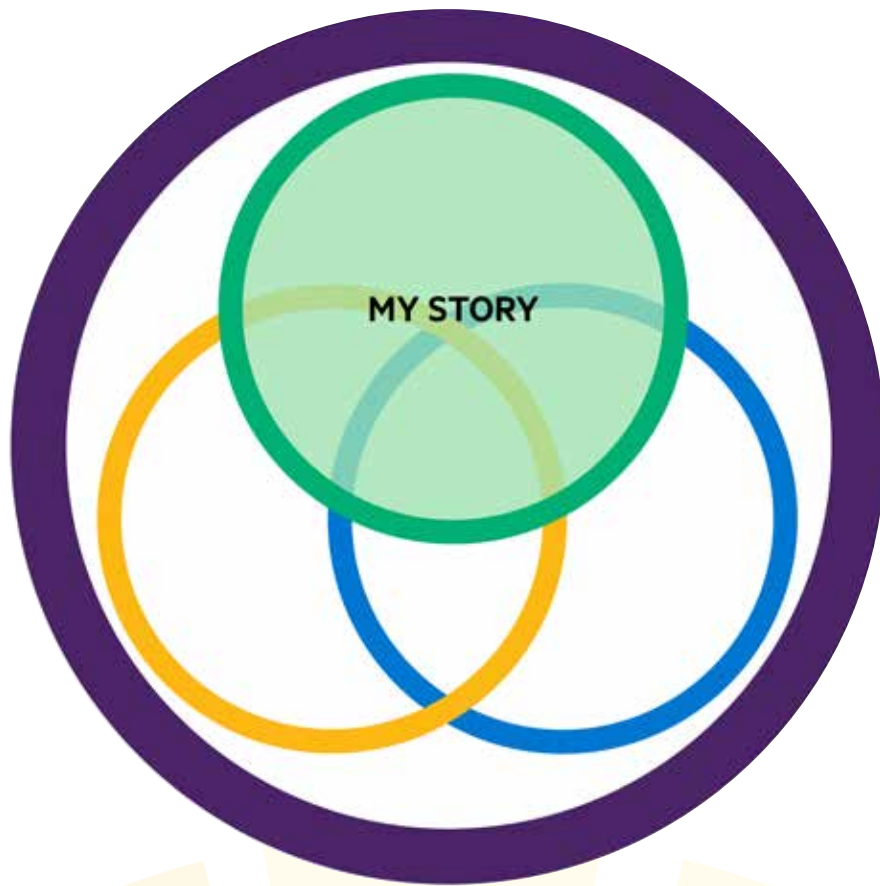
- Delegate and confirm food logistics
- Review session material
- Determine whether to use pairs or triads
- Set up the room and test all equipment and software
- Make Jeremiah 18:1-6 accessible in a Bible or printout
- Make and place copies
- Anticipate potential distractions
- Arrive early and greet participants
- Songsheet (optional); consult the list provided in the Resource and Reference section of this material.



**TIP**

If this session is the first in a regathering of your Leadership Team, consider starting the session with a review of the previous session by offering participants the opportunity to recall insights or discoveries made during the previous session, as well as related discoveries or realizations since that time.

# SESSION 3





# SESSION THREE: *My Story*

## Session Overview

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Beginning with Session Three, participants explore the power of story as a lens through which to discern an emerging clarity of call for themselves and their congregation. The session begins with Examen, a prayer practice that encourages deeper reflection on and awareness of God's guidance and work in one's personal story. The other sections of this session continue developing individual story and identity, giving participants the opportunity to practice personal storytelling. The session closes with an emphasis on calling as experienced to and through baptism. This session is the first in a series of three emphasizing stories as lenses that bring focus to calling.

### Participants will explore:

- Examen
- My Story in the Dawning diagram
- My Story Frameworks
- My Story Circle
- Baptism as foundational story

### Materials Referenced in the Session

- Projector and computer
- Whiteboard and markers or large tear-off style sticky sheets
- Writing materials for participants, paper and pens or pencils
- Christ Candle (optional)
- Worksheet Two | My Story Frameworks
- Worksheet Three | My Story Circle

### Before the Session

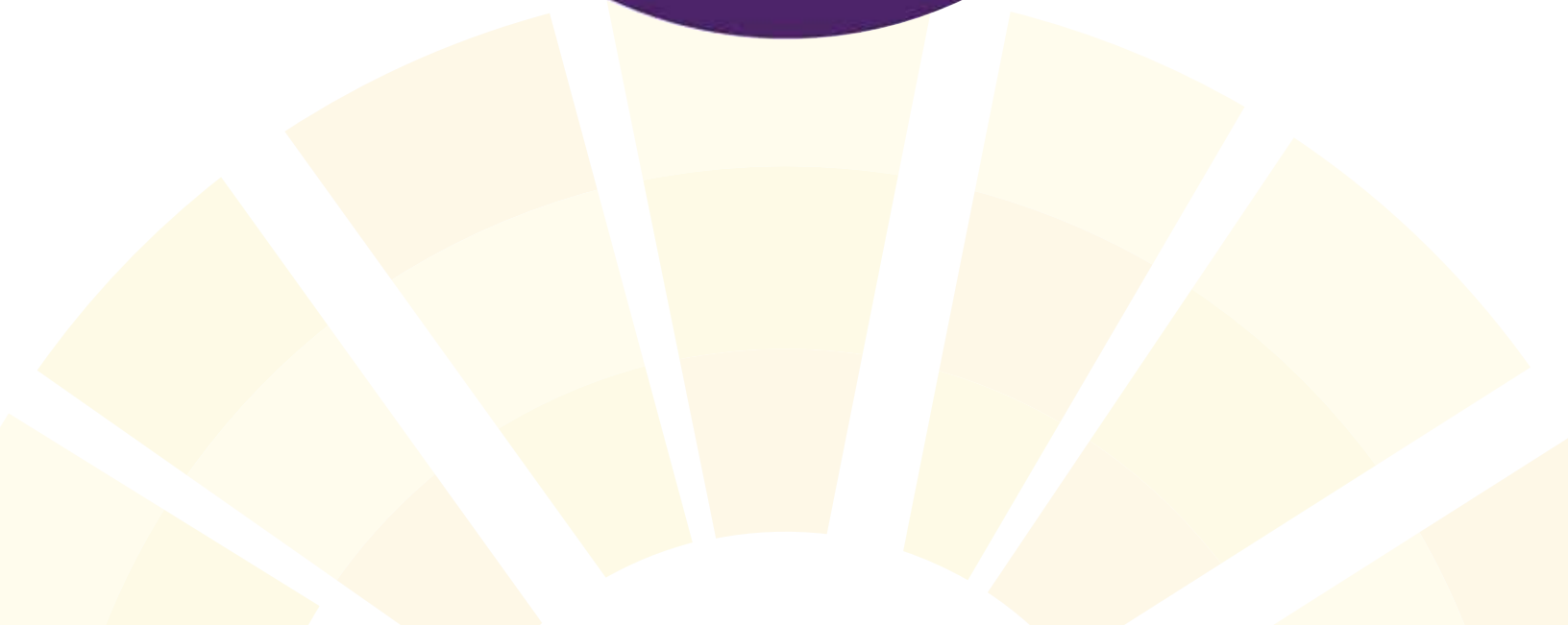
- Delegate and confirm food logistics
- Review session material
- Determine whether participants will work in pairs or triads
- Set up the room and test all equipment and software
- Make and place copies
- Anticipate potential distractions
- Arrive early and greet participants
- Songsheet (optional); consult the list provided in the Resource and Reference section of this material



**TIP**

If this session is the first in a regathering of your Leadership Team, consider starting the session with a review of the previous session by offering participants the opportunity to recall insights or discoveries made during the previous session, as well as related discoveries or realizations since that time.

# SESSION 4







# SESSION FOUR: *Our Church's Story*

## Session Overview

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Session Four continues exploring the power of story as a lens that brings focus to God's call. The session begins by introducing participants to the prayer practice Visio Divina using John August Swanson's interpretation of Luke 5:1-11, *Fisherman - Let Down Your Nets*. Participants have the opportunity to relate the gospel story to the story of their church. Sections three and four of this session reprise the Frameworks and Story Circle exercises used in Session Three, but this time around the church's story. The final section of the session involves a change in venue as participants take a field trip to the worship space to recall their church's Great Cloud of Witnesses.

### Participants will explore:

- Visio Divina
- Our Church's Story in the Dawnings diagram
- Our Church's Story Frameworks
- Our Church's Story Circle
- A Great Cloud of Witnesses

### Materials Referenced in the Session

- Projector and computer
- Whiteboard and markers or large tear-off style sticky sheets
- Writing materials for participants, paper and pens or pencils
- Christ Candle (optional)
- *Fisherman - Let Down Your Nets* by John August Swanson (Wait to distribute or reveal the image until just prior to the exercise.)
- Worksheet Four | Our Church's Story Frameworks
- Worksheet Five | Our Church's Story Circle

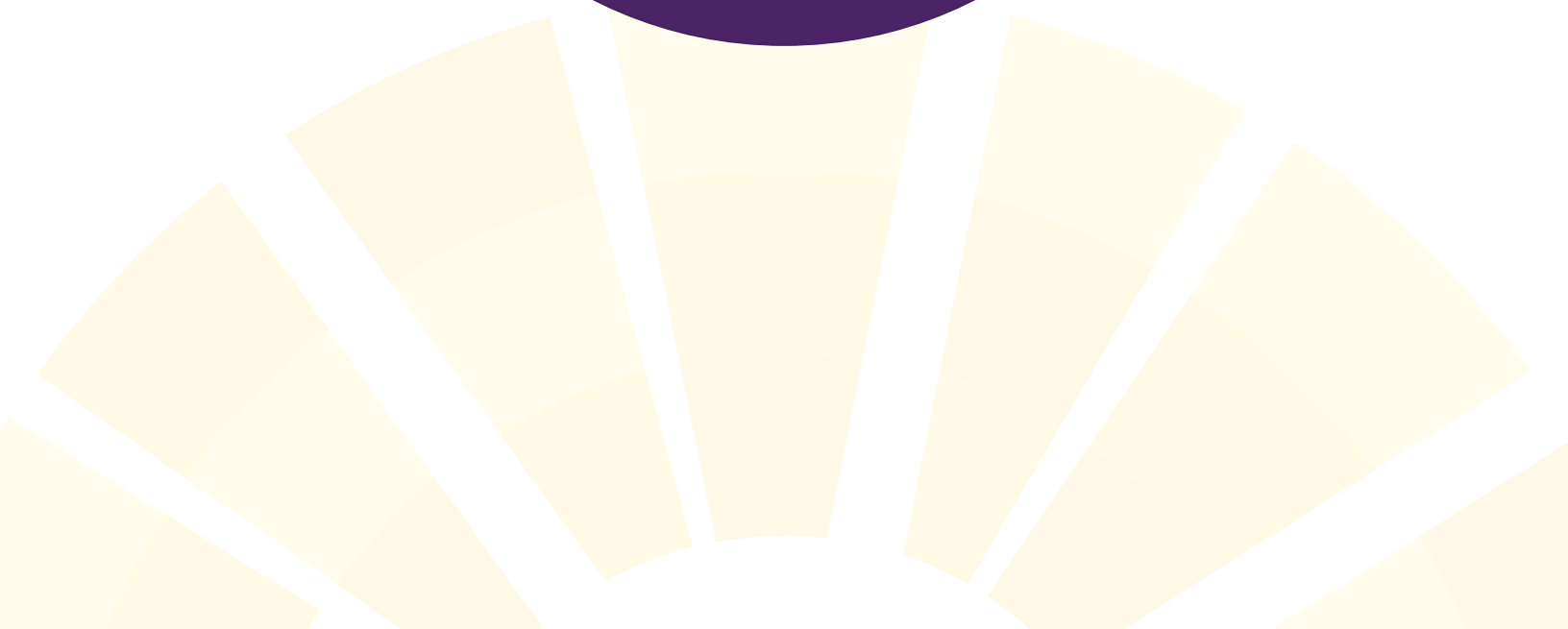
### Before the Session

- Delegate and confirm food logistics
- Review session material
- Determine whether participants will work in pairs or triads
- Set up the room and test all equipment and software
- Make and place copies
- Anticipate potential distractions
- Arrive early and greet participants
- Songsheet (optional); consult the list provided in the Resource and Reference section of this material



If this session is the first in a regathering of your Leadership Team, consider starting the session with a review of the previous session by offering participants the opportunity to recall insights or discoveries made during the previous session, as well as related discoveries or realizations since that time.

# SESSION 5





# SESSION FIVE: *Our Community's Story*

## Session Overview

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Session Five continues exploring the power of story as a lens that brings focus to God's call. The session begins in the narthex, foyer, vestibule or other common transition area that leads from the worship space (where Session Four ended) into the community. Here, participants have the opportunity to experience the prayer practice of Prayer Walking. While this Prayer Walking exercise is stationary and imaginary, where time and circumstances allow, it is possible to host a real walk. Section two helps participants consider a definition of community in advance of this session's Frameworks and Story Circle exercises. The session concludes with God's call (through Teresa of Avila) to seek the community's story by being the Presence of Christ in it.

### Participants will explore:

- Prayer Walking
- A consensus definition of the church's community
- Our Community's Story in the Dawnings diagram
- Our Community's Story Frameworks
- Our Community's Story Circle

### Materials Needed

- Projector and computer
- Whiteboard and markers or large tear-off style sticky sheets
- Writing materials for participants, paper and pens or pencils
- Christ Candle (optional)
- Worksheet Six | Our Community's Story Frameworks
- Worksheet Seven | Our Community's Story Circle

### Before the Session

- Delegate and confirm food logistics
- Review session material
- Determine whether participants will work in pairs or triads
- Set up the room and test all equipment and software
- Make and place copies
- Anticipate potential distractions
- Arrive early and greet participants
- Songsheet (optional); consult the list provided in the Resource and Reference section of this material



If this session is the first in a regathering of your Leadership Team, consider starting the session with a review of the previous session by offering participants the opportunity to recall insights or discoveries made during the previous session, as well as related discoveries or realizations since that time.

# SESSION 6





# SESSION SIX: *God's Story*

## Session Overview

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Session Six finalizes exploring the power of story as a lens that brings focus to God's call. The session begins with a very introductory experience of Centering Prayer. An alternative prayer practice experience (Finger Labyrinth) is included in the Resource and Reference materials for those facilitators who prefer it here or elsewhere. As with the other story-based sessions, this one continues with Frameworks and Story Circle exercises, this time exploring God's story. After abbreviated forms of these exercises, the session pivots toward a review of the comprehensive Dawnings diagram before finishing with sections on Leadership in a Culture of Call and looking ahead to the Congregational Sessions.

### Participants will explore:

- Centering Prayer
- God's Story in the Dawnings diagram
- God Story Frameworks and Circle
- Leadership in a Culture of Call
- Congregational Session

### Materials Needed

- Projector and computer
- Whiteboard and markers or large tear-off style sticky sheets
- Writing materials for participants, paper and pens or pencils
- Christ Candle (optional)
- Worksheet Eight | God's Story Framework
- Worksheet Nine | God's Story Circle

### Before the Session

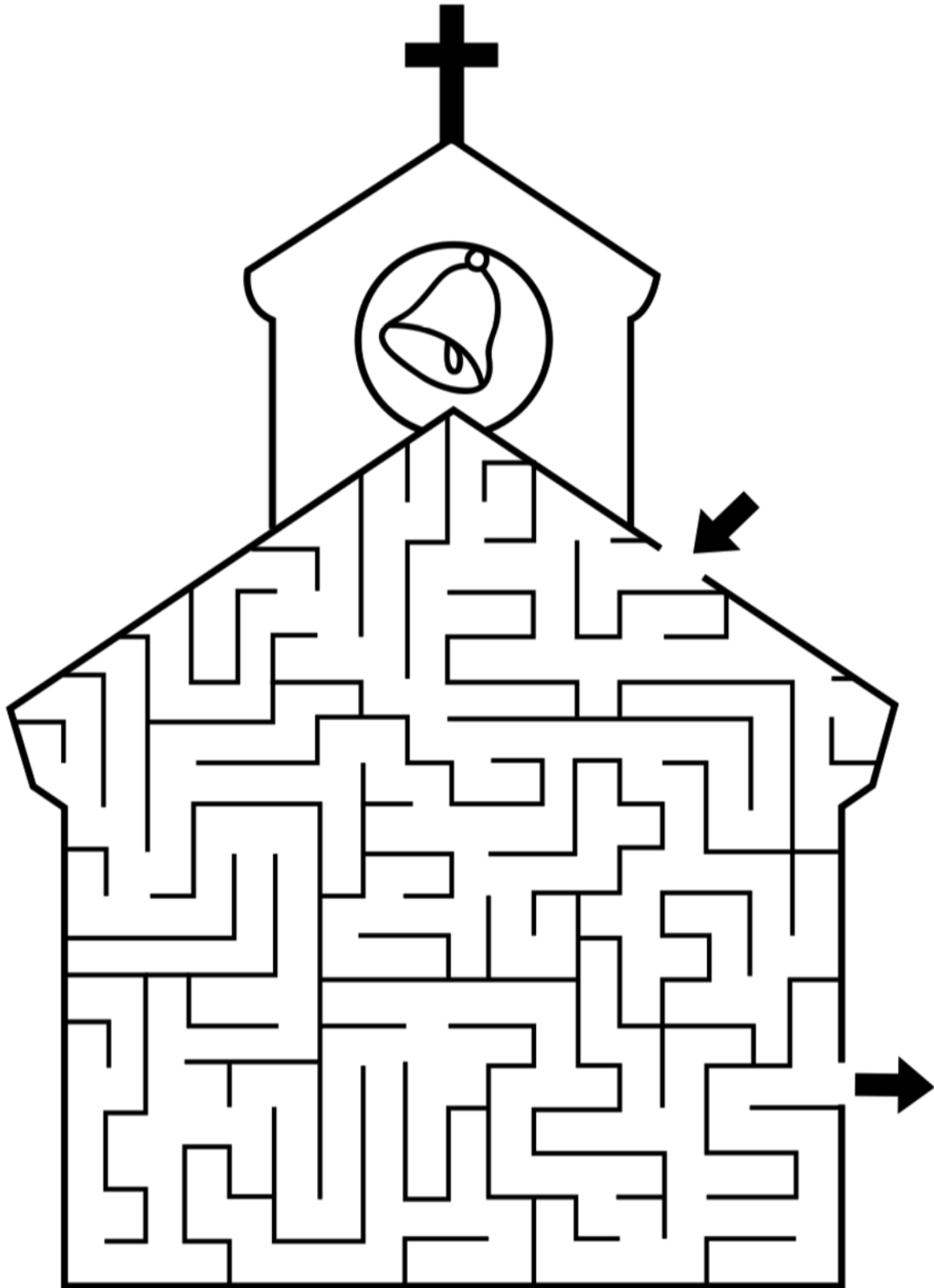
- Delegate and confirm food logistics
- Review session material
- Determine whether participants will work in pairs or triads
- Set up the room and test all equipment and software
- Make and place copies
- Anticipate potential distractions
- Arrive early and greet participants
- Songsheet (optional); consult the list provided in the Resource and Reference section of this material



If this session is the first in a regathering of your Leadership Team, consider starting the session with a review of the previous session by offering participants the opportunity to recall insights or discoveries made during the previous session, as well as related discoveries or realizations since that time.

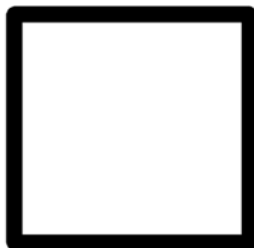
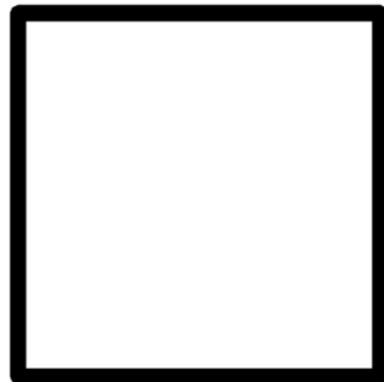
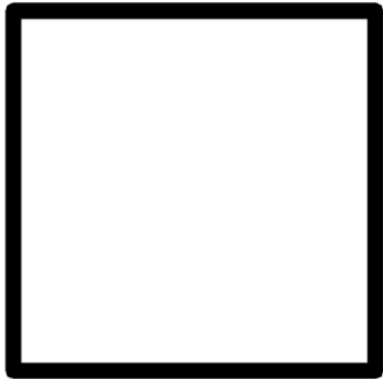
# Worksheet One

## Maze Puzzle



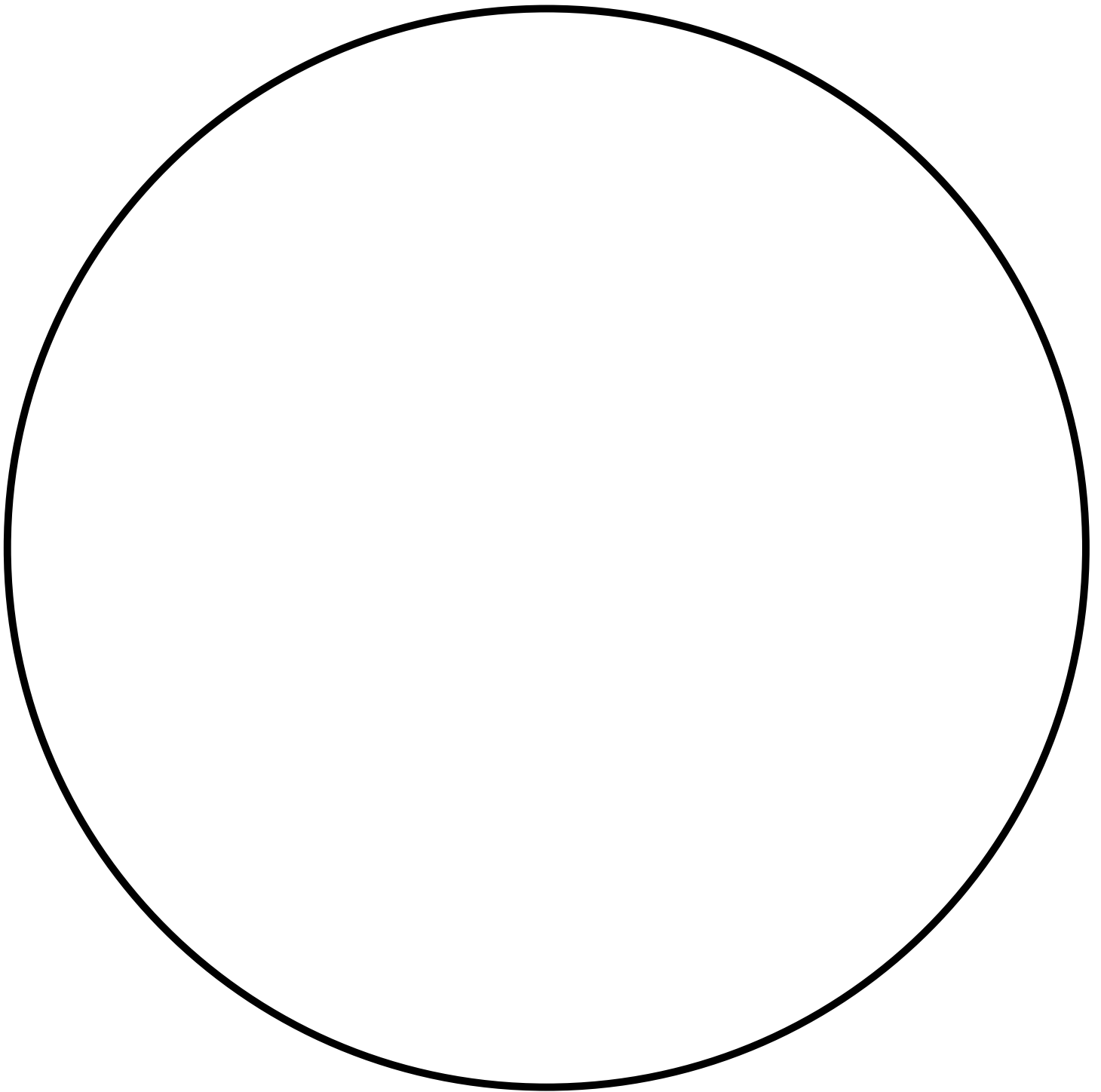
# Worksheet Two

## My Story Frameworks



# Worksheet Seven

## Our Community's Story Circle





# Dawnings Diagram Development

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