



Cultivated Ministry

A NEXT Church Field Guide to Bearing Fruit



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Fall 2017

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Why Cultivated Ministry? An Introduction to This Work

A few years ago, NEXT Church convened creative, talented leaders to talk about the ways in which the church is collaboratively starting and supporting new ministries. In the room were leaders from large, established congregations; leaders from small upstart ministry ventures; and everything in between. There was energy in the conversation as we heard about ministries in places and with people often overlooked in mainline Protestant circles and creative ministries launched by established congregations. But the conversation got heated quickly when it turned toward resources, sustainability, fundraising, and accountability.

One talented leader of an exciting and creative new ministry likened it to The Hunger Games. “You come up with a good — even proven — ministry,” she said, “and everyone is excited about it. When you ask for help in paying for it, there are three larger churches and a couple of grant programs to go to and these creative ministries end up fighting each other to our own death to get any financial resources.”

A little while later, the pastor of a large congregation with a multi-million-dollar budget said, “What I hear you asking for is a blank check and we simply can’t give that to you. In a season where we have many resources, but are facing budget cuts of our own and laying off staff, we have to justify every dollar we spend.”

Another leader chimed in, “Our presbytery has money to fund new ventures but we expect them to be growing numerically and financially sustainable within five years.” “What if we’re working in a community that is financially incapable of being self-sustaining?” was the immediate reply.

What became clear in the conversation is that there is much creativity and leadership in the present-day margins of the church, and energy and desire to try new things in established communities of faith. At the same time, the resources needed to fertilize that growth often rest in the established, traditional communities of faith and in denominational structures. Many of these traditional communities of faith are interested — even eager — to invest in the emergence of new faith communities that may look and feel radically different from their own. **Yet these partnerships can become stymied because no agreed upon metrics exist for measuring faithfulness and success.**

Traditional metrics — such as membership counts, financial totals, and worship attendance — have proved inadequate for measuring the effectiveness of traditional communities of faith, much less emergent ones, but other metrics have not risen in their place. Thus, we revert to what we know, perpetuating a status quo that serves neither partner in the leadership development and experimental learning the church

needs now in abundance if we are to make the move into new, thriving models of church life.

Over the course of the last eighteen months, with support from Leadership Education at Duke Divinity School and the Texas Presbyterian Foundation, NEXT Church has convened a talented group of leaders to tackle this issue within the life of the church. As this writing and design team met, they concluded the project is bigger than metrics and granting money, but is really about the whole culture of assessment, accountability, learning, and storytelling in the church — on every level, from actions of a committee to the direction of a congregation to the purpose of a presbytery or mission network. What results from their work is **Cultivated Ministry: Bearing Fruit through Theology, Accountability, Learning, and Storytelling**. Cultivated Ministry is a culture and process of ministry that does not rest on traditional metrics, nor does it abdicate accountability altogether. It is a commitment to four interlocking means of assessment, evaluation, and (re)design aimed at nurturing thoughtful expressions of God’s mission in the world.

We are excited to share this resource with you and pray it will be of use to you in your work. We are developing additional resources to accompany this guide. For more information and the latest resources, check out our website: www.nextchurch.net.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jessica Tate".

Jessica Tate

Director of NEXT Church

Fall 2017

We give thanks to God for the talented team of people who have worked on this project:

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We are grateful for the saints of First Presbyterian Church of Shreveport, LA, whose grant enabled us to distribute this field guide widely and develop the associated training and implementation materials.

Dear partner in ministry:

So, you want to try out Cultivated Ministry at your church or on a presbytery program or somewhere else. Great! That's one of the most important steps. It means **you care about effective ministry**.

We've been asked whether you teach Cultivated Ministry or just start using it and the answer is yes! Start wherever you have the most energy. You can try to tackle all four components or just pick one area to introduce. Here are some suggestions for jumping in.

- Read through the Cultivated Ministry materials. We deliberately made them brief. There are appendices in the back to help you put some ideas into practice.
- Tell your team that you care about Cultivated Ministry. Go ahead and use that language. Then, teach what that looks like. You might teach through the four movements of Cultivated Ministry. All four movements are a way of assessing the impact of the ministry. This doesn't replace other reports, per se, but it steers reports in the direction of learning and better decision-making.
- "In Cultivated Ministry, good **theology** is important. Can we articulate together why we are doing this ministry?" Read through the theology portion of Cultivated Ministry together or consider doing a "so that" exercise: "We are doing ___ so that ___ happens." This helps people think through their theological direction. For example:
 - ▶ We are moving our vacation bible camp to the evening *so that* more families can participate *so that* more people grow in faith this summer.
 - ▶ We are re-tooling our care ministries at the presbytery *so that* pastors truly experience Sabbath.
- "In Cultivated Ministry, **storytelling** helps people really see how and where transformation is taking place." You could begin the practice of sharing "God sightings," or how you have seen God changing people's lives through this ministry. That is a powerful way to start or end a meeting.
- "In Cultivated Ministry, we might think of things in terms of **learning**, not just reporting." You could use some of the charts in the Cultivated Ministry field guide that help a ministry think about where it is in its life cycle or who needs to be part of the decision-making.
- "In Cultivated Ministry, we are mutually **accountable** to each other." You could begin a practice of starting every meeting with 10 minutes of prep time, using that time to go over what you hope to accomplish. Then, end every meeting with 10

minutes of evaluation, asking how it went. Did you have the people there you hoped would come? Did you achieve what you hoped to accomplish? Who is committing to do what next?

The most important thing to do is to start. Try it out.

In gratitude and hope —

The Cultivated Ministry Team

Cultivated Ministry: Bearing Fruit through Theology, Accountability, Learning, and Storytelling

How do we recognize success in ministry? There used to be a widely held and simple answer to this question: success is measured by growth in membership, attendance, and financial support. Increasingly, however, these metrics seem out of touch with the realities of ministry in contemporary post-Christendom North America.

Consider the experience of Chineta Goodjoin, the organizing pastor of New Hope Presbyterian Church, a new worshipping community in Orange County, California.

“Planting a church is exciting and challenging at the same time. It is exciting to be part of a collective movement of prayer, creativity, and energy in which a newly-formed faith community defines its values, mission, and service in the world. It is exciting to see the vision of the church manifested in the lives of people and to witness its initiatives make a positive change in the community.

However, these sacred and joyous experiences of church planting also include challenging expectations that can leave leaders feeling depleted, defeated, and overwhelmed. This is especially true when it comes to defining success and growth in new worshipping communities.

Many church planters feel pressure to demonstrate substantial and consistent growth in numbers and attendance. In addition, success is often measured by the size of the church’s budget, the financial contributions of members, and securing a building for worship.

In the process of organizing New Hope Church, I have experienced the painful reality that initiatives set forth to save souls, support the underserved, and provide resources that speak to the plight of poverty, gun violence, and homelessness do not tell the story of success like being able to share the “greatest” of these: growth in attendance, a solid offering, and a balanced budget.

While these facets of measuring church growth have their place, it seems that there must be a way to measure and define the success of a church that encompasses the stories of hope, love, and unity experienced through effective ministries and outreach. These stories — the ones about lives changed and the presence of Christ unveiled in acts of service and faith — are the narratives of

the gospel. These are the stories that break the chains of poverty and marginalization. They must be included in measures that seek to define and evaluate a church's viability and success."

There are countless examples like this throughout the church today. Whether it is a new worshipping community, leaders of an established church trying to evaluate the effectiveness of their ministries, a ministry initiative applying for funding grants, a denominational judicatory evaluating the viability of a struggling congregation, or the development of ministry and community partnerships: **we need new ways of naming and measuring the work God is calling us to do in the world so that we know how best to be stewards of the resources God has entrusted to us.**

More Than Numbers

Church leaders have a love/hate relationship with numbers: we gladly share them when they're good and ignore them when they're not. Unless our ministries are doing well in terms of the traditional metrics of membership, attendance, and finances, many of us exhibit a pious disdain for statistics and suggest that, "it's not about the numbers." But we all know the truth: numbers matter. If you are reading this field guide, you no doubt have a vested interest in the metrics of your ministry or the ministry you are thinking about supporting. Numbers don't tell the whole story, but they do tell a story.

Following the birth of the church on the first Pentecost after the death and resurrection of Jesus, numerical growth was recognized as a sign of the legitimacy and vitality of the ongoing Jesus movement.¹ As the notion of Christendom as a geopolitical force took root in late antiquity and evolved throughout the middle ages, the early modern period, and the era of European colonialism, the growth of the church was implicitly and explicitly connected to the political, economic, military, geographic, and cultural power of the various Christian empires.² When denominations were established in the 18th century as the organizing strategy of the numerous Protestant churches of North America, metrics such as membership, worship attendance, and financial contributions were indicators of institutional success and strength. By the middle of the 20th century, this form of corporate Christianity had reached its zenith.³

Today, mainline Protestants find ourselves in a very different situation. Constantinian forms of Christendom and European colonialism have ended — though their legacies certainly persist — and the cultural Christendom of North America has been unravelling for the last half century. During this period, mainline Protestant denominations have experienced significant declines in membership and resources. Increasingly, even evangelical denominations, non-denominational congregations, and megachurches are flatlining or beginning to lose members.⁴ Membership-based organizations of all forms are being eclipsed by social networks as the relational infrastructure of American society.⁵ Faith communities now compete with an ever-

increasing number of nonprofit organizations for religion's once dominant share of charitable giving.⁶ Widespread distrust of institutions and shifts in popular theology have resulted in sharp increases in religious un-affiliation (the so-called "rise of the nones") and those who identify as "spiritual but not religious."⁷ In this post-Christendom age of networked individuals, success defined by the old denominational metrics of membership, worship attendance, and resources seems limited at best. In fact, these metrics may already be irrelevant anachronisms.

Yet we cannot simply abandon the practice of evaluation because the numbers do not work in our favor. **If what we are doing matters in our lives and in the world, we must develop meaningful ways to measure effectiveness and hold each other accountable to the ongoing mission of Jesus Christ to which we are called.** Instead of complacency with the status quo or blindness to the realities of numerical decline, we must commit ourselves to a different way of doing ministry, a different way of determining what successful ministry looks like, and a different way of telling our story.

Cultivated Ministry

Jesus often used agricultural metaphors to describe God's kingdom and our calling to participate in its growth. As anyone who has tried to maintain a garden knows, growing desirable plants requires intentionality and hard work. Growing nothing is easy. Growing weeds is easy. Growing delicious fruits and vegetables and beautiful flowers is much more difficult.

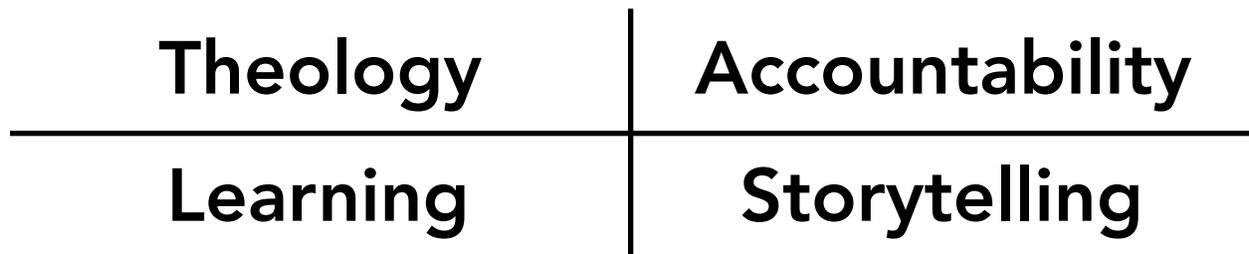
According to the Book of Genesis, from the beginning of human history God has called us to be caretakers and cultivators of our local contexts. The first commandment given to human beings was to be fruitful. This ancient calling provides the guiding metaphor for this field guide. Cultivated Ministry is a third way between toeing the line of traditional metrics and abdicating accountability altogether.

Haphazard gardening is irresponsible and ineffective. Fruitful gardening involves mindfulness and discipline. A cultivated garden requires planning, ongoing assessment, learning when confronted with new challenges, and periodic pruning. Likewise, **Cultivated Ministry insists that we undertake our work with a clear and purposeful understanding of how our activities contribute to God's mission in the world.**

As practical theologians have long recognized, ministry requires seasons of reflection, evaluation, and evolution. From time to time we must slow down and ask critical questions about what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how we can do it better. Without this discipline, our practices and methods become stale or out of touch with our rapidly changing cultural contexts. It is far too easy to rest on our laurels and allow existing ministries to outlive their original purposes or effectiveness. Unless we adopt

open postures of listening, learning, and intentional discernment, we are prone to miss opportunities for the development of new ministries to meet the needs of new situations.

Cultivated Ministry is more than a new set of metrics or a collection of plug-and-play tools. Instead, **it is a commitment to four interlocking means of assessment, evaluation, and (re)design aimed at nurturing thoughtful expressions of God’s mission in the world.** This is not a recipe to follow, nor a linear process to carry out; rather, these four movements happen simultaneously, informing and supporting each other as an organic and coherent whole.



Cultivated Ministry begins and ends with **theology**, with our belief that God is intimately engaged in the world and has called us to bear fruit that will last. In this work to which we are called, we practice mutual **accountability** to God and to each other. Along the way, we commit ourselves to constant **learning** and reformation. At every step, we listen for good news of God’s redemptive work through transformative **storytelling**.

This four-dimensional practice of assessment is neither focused on the past nor fearful of the future. It is time for us to regain control of our own narratives. We are much more than passive players in the unfolding drama of human history. With God’s help, we can shape our own future and tell our own stories. God has placed us in the world and has given us seeds to plant. Now, as stewards of God’s good creation, it’s up to us to step forward in faith. It’s up to us to practice Cultivated Ministry.

Tilling the Soil: Back to the Basics of Assessment

Before entering the four movements of Cultivated Ministry, we must first till the soil of our existing practices. **For the purposes of this field guide, the ground that most needs breaking (or re-breaking) is our understanding of assessment.**

Modern assessment of human organizations found its beginnings in the corporate world as senior executives and boards began to apply principles of the scientific method to the production of profit. For many years, revenues, margins, and efficiency dominated the measurement focus. Driven principally by granting organizations and other donors, some of these same measures began to be applied to the non-profit

sector, even though there was an early recognition that outcomes in the social and human services fields cannot simply count revenue over expense.

From these beginnings, the corporate world has evolved and other priorities have emerged as valuable measures of success. For example, even though for-profit corporations must attend to shareholder value, most leading corporate entities now measure double- or triple-bottom lines with metrics such as diversity, community impact, and carbon footprints. Recent years have also seen the advent of “benefit corporations” — for-profit corporate entities that include positive social and environmental impact as part of their governing goals.⁸

For better and for worse, churches and denominations have always been shaped by the prevailing practices of the culture in which they are located through a process known as “institutional isomorphism” — in a given time period, even across different fields, institutions tend to resemble each other.⁹ In the 19th and 20th centuries, North American denominations were therefore influenced by these developments in the corporate world. However, church institutions are largely stuck in the practices of the mid-20th century and have not evolved along with the rest of the corporate world.¹⁰

Along with other organizations in the social sectors, church leaders often push back against the practices of corporate assessment, contending that metrics have negative implications or consequences. “Some things just can’t be measured,” it is argued. “We’re not about numbers; we’re about caring for people.” “You can’t measure change in people’s lives or hearts.” These and many other myths blind us from honest evaluation and can prevent improvement and innovation.

Against these myths stands a valuable insight: **if it is important, it can be measured**. If we want people to support an endeavor with their time, talent, and resources, we must be able to make a compelling case for its relevance and effectiveness. Potential donors, participants, and stakeholders deserve transparent articulations of what we are doing and why we need their investment and support. To this end, there are at least four interrelated features that can be measured for any project, program, or organizational evaluation: **need, inputs, outputs, and impact**.

Need

Social advocates have been measuring need for years.

- There are X (number of) starving children in a given population.
- X percentage of citizens are homeless or do not have health coverage.
- X percentage of our children can’t read on grade level.
- There are X (number of) older adults living without adequate support.

Based on these kinds of metrics, requests for support focus on the perception of need and presume either an obligation on the part of the funder (public entities) or the goodwill of the benefactor (foundations and other donors). Importance is quantified according to the magnitude of need.

Inputs

Inputs are resources deployed to meet a particular need. This approach to measurement aims to demonstrate the broad appeal of a project, program, or organization. Input measures are often arguments for the continuation of funding or the expansion of funding in matching-grant situations. Take the Girl Scouts as an example. The need is extracurricular leadership development for the girls of a community. Inputs include the number of participants and the number of leaders combined with financial support. The greater these numbers, the broader the appeal and the more compelling the argument for support becomes. **Unless we think that making more members is the final goal of the church, the traditional denominational metrics of membership and financial resources are only measures of input.** There are two more layers of assessment that need to be considered.

Outputs

Even if we understand the need and commit resources to it, the question of effectiveness still looms. Stakeholders at all levels are concerned with outputs. For example, does a program aimed at dropout prevention result in fewer dropouts? The answer can be documented. Paired with individual stories of success, such outputs can be very powerful. **Outputs are the direct results of the application of inputs to a need.** The traditional denominational metric of worship and program attendance is one way to measure output — but it may not be the most significant, depending on how we understand the mission of the church.

Impact

As powerful as the movement from need to outputs is, there is another layer of measurement required to truly understand the value of any endeavor. This is the “so what?” question. To continue the earlier example: even if we can demonstrate that a program is preventing dropouts, why does this matter? What is the *impact* of such programs on the community? Examples of measuring impact include longitudinal tracking of a particular cohort or population studies with relevant demographics. In the case of the dropout program, if it can be shown that finishing school makes a difference in the lives of a group of students across the subsequent decade of their lives or that education results in economic stability and growth for a community, we now understand the impact of the dropout program. **Impact is a measurable change due to specific programmatic outputs.** For examples of outputs and impacts, see **Appendix A.**

Putting It All Together

To see how these four forms of assessment work together, let's consider Habitat for Humanity in Charlotte, NC. The **need** for affordable housing is easily demonstrated by comparing population income and affordable housing stock. Most cities have such data readily available. Charlotte estimates it needs 35,000 additional homes to house all families at a cost equal to or less than 35% of household income. The **inputs** are easily counted as well: it takes approximately \$8 million and 5,000 volunteers annually to build these homes. In terms of **outputs**, approximately 100 homes are constructed each year, 5000 citizens own and live in Habitat homes, and about one-fifth of these homeowners have paid their mortgages in full and the default rate remains below 5%.¹¹ Research validates the **impact** of the Habitat homeownership model by demonstrating greater educational attainment, better health, and improved civic engagement among homeowners.¹² Numerous individual success stories put a human face on this impact and widespread support for Habitat continues.

This assessment paradigm moves from naming needs to assembling and deploying inputs to measuring outputs to demonstrating impact in the form of changed population statistics and cultural behaviors. This more sophisticated understanding of outputs and impact is essential to pursuing the most effective strategies for the real needs of people. Without assessment, tradition and intuition become the main drivers of activity. Stakeholders rightfully demand more accountability.

In Cultivated Ministry, this kind of assessment happens through four interlocking movements: theology, accountability, learning, and storytelling. Let's explore each of these in more detail.

Theology as Assessment

It is a theological fallacy for Christians to think of ourselves as victims of post-Christendom cultural shifts beyond our control. It is a lack of spiritual imagination to act as if our faith communities and organizations are without strength or power in the world. It is a misunderstanding of our own history to assume that we are facing unprecedented challenges. The realities of the first-century Roman Empire — which witnessed the exponential growth of the early church — were no less hostile to the way of Jesus than the realities of 21st-century North America.¹³ In both contexts, the Christian mission remains the same. Now, as then, followers of Jesus are commissioned to make new followers of Jesus and participate in the emergence of what he called God's kingdom. Jesus was committed to this mission and held his disciples accountable to his radical vision of individuals and societies transformed.

As members of numerically declining denominations, mainline Protestants often find ourselves caught between a false polarity. On the one hand, we long for our culture's

idolatrous notion of *success*. According to this way of thinking, if you aren't experiencing significant growth, you are dying. Maintaining the status quo is stagnation. Numbers tell the story.

On the other hand, church leaders often take solace in a notion of *faithfulness*, which downplays numbers in favor of the integrity of our devotion, social witness, and service to others. According to this way of thinking, God is pleased so long as we faithfully carry out the traditional practices just as we have received them, or are assured of the righteousness of our intention and action, regardless of our effectiveness.

Rather than either of these inclinations, Jesus purposely calls us to *bear fruit*.¹⁴ This metaphor evokes consideration of both quantity and quality. Neither a bountiful yield of mediocre produce nor a small yield of sweet fruit are ultimately satisfying. Those charged with bearing fruit — especially fruit that will last — must be concerned with the quantity and quality of their product. **Cultivated Ministry is therefore a commitment to *fruitfulness*, which attends not only to the faithfulness of our endeavors, but also to the outputs and meaningful impact of our work.**

Cultivated Ministry is also a reorientation to the missional goal of kingdom growth. It is noteworthy that Jesus only mentions “church” twice in the New Testament. Both instances are oblique references in the Gospel of Matthew (16:18 and 18:17) and may in fact be editorial additions. By contrast, throughout his ministry Jesus was primarily concerned with the emergence of God's kingdom. Consider, for example, the first words attributed to Jesus in the first of our gospels to be written down: “Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!”¹⁵ Jesus' ministry was urgent. Jesus' ministry was rooted in the here and now. Jesus' ministry was about the imminent manifestation of God's kingdom. Jesus' ministry was about change and transformation. Jesus' ministry was — and is — good news for a world all too familiar with bad news.

Significantly, Jesus understood God's kingdom in terms of fruitfulness. In the parable of the sower, God's kingdom is compared to a seed that takes root in good soil and bears thirty, sixty, and hundredfold yields of produce.¹⁶ In the parable of the mustard seed¹⁷ and the parable of the leaven,¹⁸ God's kingdom is described as a movement that begins small but grows into a powerful force of care and transformation in the world. In these evocative parables of fruitfulness, inputs (seed, leaven) are visibly multiplied into tangible outputs (produce, a mustard plant, bread). Yet equally important, these outputs have a measurable *impact* in the world: sustenance and shelter. This is what it means to bear fruit that will last.

For several decades, missional theologians have urged contemporary followers of Jesus to **think less in terms of church growth and more in terms of kingdom growth**.¹⁹ Rather than considering “mission” as a program of the church, missional ecclesiology

envisions the church as an instrument of God’s mission of reconciliation, redemption, and transformation in the world.²⁰ **The church is an input, not an output – a means to the end, never the end itself.** Counting inputs and outputs is valuable only insofar as it helps measure the external *impact* of our work.

In today’s world, there are as many different expressions of missional discipleship and fruit-bearing as there are cultural spaces into which God’s people are sent. It is of utmost importance for each community of disciples – whether it is an established congregation, a new worshipping community, a nonprofit organization, or something else entirely – to discern and clearly articulate the particular needs they are called to address and the particular shape of God’s mission in which they are called to participate. Having done this important work, each community can most appropriately assemble and right-size its inputs, quantify its outputs, and assess its impact in the world – in short, be good stewards of their God-given gifts.

Finally, Jesus understood the importance of pruning. “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vineyard keeper. He removes any of my branches that don’t produce fruit, and he trims any branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit.”²¹ Sometimes our work needs to be reduced in order to expand. Sometimes aspects of it need to come to an end. Again, the only way to make these determinations is through a thoughtful process of assessment.

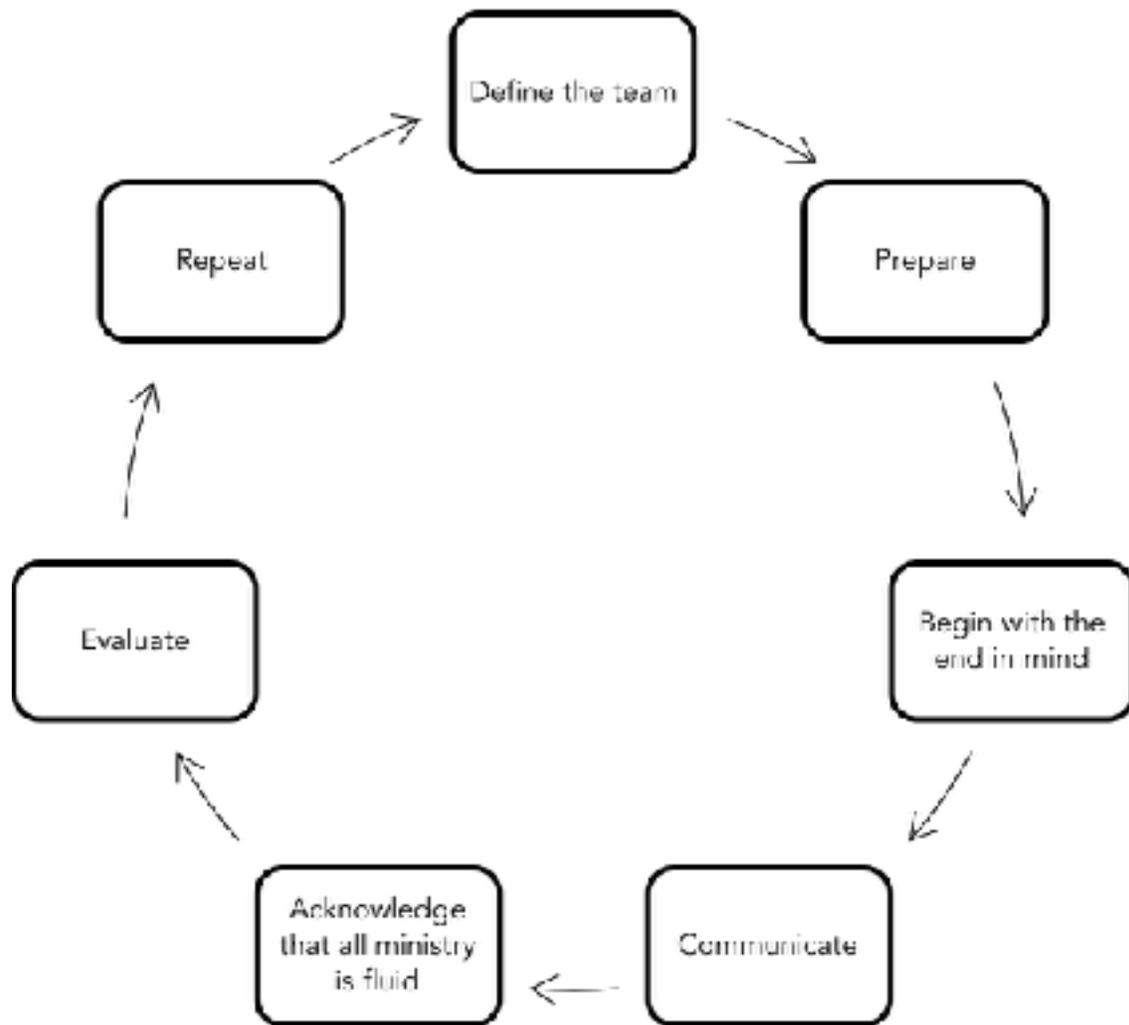
As we practice Cultivated Ministry, we consistently ask ourselves the following theological questions about fruitfulness:

- What needs exist in our contexts?
- What resources has God given us to address these needs? (Inputs)
- Are we bearing fruit to satisfy these needs? If not, why? (Outputs)
- If so, is our yield sufficient? Is our fruit satisfying? (Impact)
- Can we articulate why we are doing this ministry? (Impact)
- Are there aspects of our work that need to be pruned?

Mutual Accountability as Assessment

Of course, we understand the harvest is ultimately in God’s hands. Yet we also know that even though the harvest is plentiful, the workers are few.²² Jesus nurtured a culture of utmost accountability. He demonstrated relational power, clarity of purpose, and gave of himself fully in joy, love, and grace. We may not be able to attain such a level of accountability, but we can lift it up as our guide as we seek to bear fruit that will last in our particular ministry contexts. To do this, creating a pattern and discipline of mutual accountability is essential.

Mutual accountability is a continuous cycle of inviting participation, developing clarity, acting, reflecting, evaluating, and acting again:



- **Define the team:** Who is involved in this effort?
- **Prepare:** Before the program or project begins, partners identify a process for mutual accountability and develop shared expectations.
- **Begin with the end in mind:** Agree upon assessment measures.
- **Communicate:** Agree upon a communication format.
- **Acknowledge that all ministry is fluid:** It's about living water, so expect changes as the project/program is implemented.
- **Evaluate:** Discuss how it went.
- **Repeat:** Go back to the theological framework to consider fruitfulness and whether or not to continue this work.

For suggestions on how to implement this approach to mutual accountability, please see **Appendix B**.

We often mistake perfection, regulation, or compliance with rules for accountability. Mutual accountability is not:

- Driving by the church to see if the pastor's car is there.
- Combing through last year's itemized spending reports to find where someone made a mistake.
- Nit-picking about the music, the sermon, or the temperature of the sanctuary after a worship service.
- Sending a strongly worded letter to the higher governing body highlighting a problem.
- Taking attendance.
- Sending out a bunch of surveys or paying a consultant to tell you what is and is not working about your ministry.
- Sending in the annual statistic report to the denomination headquarters and having the rolls and minutes reviewed in a timely manner.

Rather, when mutual accountability is present, ministry will feel:

- **Transparent:** Participants in the ministry can talk about what they are trying to do and are on the same page. They are up-front about who is involved and who is not. They make realistic goals and plan to be in communication. They are honest with each other when something could be improved or when a ministry or event does not meet expectations. This is handled without blame but also without avoidance.
- **Energizing:** Participants are able to articulate in real time what they seek to achieve. They become more future-oriented than backward-looking. The past is understood a learning tool. Failures are shared. Successes are celebrated. Little time and energy is devoted to those who want to complain but do not want to participate in the ministry's improvement. Participants are honest about their energy level and make space for different reactions to the same program or event, based on how different human beings are wired.
- **Relational:** Participants come to feel connected with God and with each other. They don't dread responding to emails or attending meetings because they have care for the others involved beyond simply the short-term activities of the project. They spend time in each meeting finding out more about the passions, gifts, and animating stories of the people around them. They hear about the impact of their actions through stories of those affected.
- **Empowering:** The work becomes transcendent and participants offer grace to one another when a tough season befalls someone in the group. There is

less talk about “filling the slots” or “finding new blood.” There is more talk about building leaders and inviting someone into the work because of their particular story and how that generates appetite for the work. People don’t micro-manage each other because they have respect for each other’s commitment and can freely talk about issues as they arise. People don’t fade off or burn out because they are serving in an area where they are known and the work engages their primary areas of interest.

In ministry, we are continuously accountable to each other, but the degree of accountability varies drastically. Consider these contrasting examples of low and high accountability:

- If people are constantly referred to as “volunteers” and excused when they don’t have time to follow through, there is low accountability.
- If people see their ministry as a priority in their life, a way for them to connect to God and make a difference in their community, there is high accountability.
- If people complain that meetings are a waste of time, if burnout is rampant, if the “same old people” are doing everything, and if new people struggle to assimilate because our communities feel insular or intimidating, there is low accountability.
- If people seem to have more ideas and energy than time, if people are excited about what they’re doing and talk about their ministries, if people give of their own money to make things happen because they believe it matters, and if people want to bring friends into the ministry, there is high accountability.
- If reports are out of date, if meetings are spent rehashing old ideas, and if there is a fearful sense that there isn’t “enough” to get it all done even though people rarely say “no” to ideas, there is low accountability.
- If most people involved know each other well, celebrate successes with each other, and support each other — even with humor — when failures inevitably happen, there is high accountability.

Following Jesus’ example, we want communities of faith to be highly accountable to one another and to God’s mission in the world.

Learning as Assessment

Discernment is a necessary part of Cultivated Ministry. What do we understand God is calling us to do in each particular ministry or program? Before the organizers and/or leaders of any ministry venture forward, we must understand the values and theology that are motivating the ministry in question. Why do we worship? Why do we teach? Why do we seek to relieve suffering? Why do we stand for social justice? Why do we spread the gospel of Jesus Christ? The answers to these questions are likely to be the drivers of the ministry methods and objectives, as well as the foundation of the learning that will enable us to continually make the ministry more effective. As people of faith, we must always hold ourselves accountable to an articulated theology lest we fall into the trap of counting outputs rather than increasing impact.

We need to continually assess and adjust our ministries to better meet our objectives, and, in some instances, adjust those objectives to better serve the kingdom of God. According to McKinsey and Company²³ — one of the foremost curators of assessment tools in the non-profit world — **measurement is always forward-looking, aimed at making our work better in the future**. This stands in stark contrast to the backward-looking measurement in which most churches and mission partners engage. How many members were on our roll at a certain date? How many attendees were in worship? How much money was collected and distributed? These measures count what *was* and provide no insight into *what might be*. Yet the very essence of the gospel calls us into what is becoming.

The key to making this paradigm shift is understanding that *learning is the primary goal of assessment*. In a learning-driven approach to assessment, we shift from history to vision, from outputs to impact, from reality to in-breaking possibility. We assess what we have done, not as justification for continued practice but as the springboard to future innovation.

As part of Cultivated Ministry, McKinsey’s “Learning for Social Impact” framework has been adapted as a starting point,²⁴ recasting it through a theological lens to be more applicable to the myriad contexts of ministry today. The challenge is that there are no cookie cutter answers; no simple forms to fill out. The responsibility of determining purpose, assessment, and communication lies with each ministry itself. Consequently, there exists no set of common metrics to which every ministry must conform and the aggregation across denominations or geographic regions is not the main goal. Rather, **the purpose of learning-driven assessment is to enable leaders to bring more intentionality to the activities and practices of ministry and thus increase the ability to learn, grow, and become increasingly effective in fulfilling their mission**.

Developing Learning-Driven Assessment

There are three primary elements to learning as assessment:

1) Clarify the Ministry Objectives

To clarify ministry objectives, you need to discern and answer two seemingly simple, but critical, questions. **What is the objective of the ministry** and **what is the stage of implementation of the ministry?** These are rooted in theology and will define the parameters in which accountability takes place.

1. What is the objective of the ministry?

A well-defined objective will result in greater learning and more significant impact. Broadly speaking, Christian ministry might be categorized into six areas of activity: evangelism, worship, Christian formation, pastoral care, service, and social witness. If objectives are left at this high level, assessment will get fuzzy very quickly. It is difficult to evaluate the impact of a category as broad as “worship.” A better objective might be: “To create a faithful and inclusive worship experience that is meaningful to people of all ages, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations living within one mile of our sanctuary.” The precise definition and articulation of objectives leads to more meaningful metrics and deeper learning for improvement

2. What is the stage of implementation of the ministry?

Where you find yourself in the process will affect your learning goals. Using this model, there are four stages of maturity to help distinguish between a start-up venture and a well-established ministry. There is no value judgment associated with this question, but the learning goals will change based on the stage of the ministry. For the purpose of this model we assume four stages of maturity:

1. Framing the context.
2. Developing a ministry plan.
3. Implementing and refining practice.
4. Scaling and sustaining the ministry.

In each case, the learning questions and therefore the metrics and assessment will all be different. The challenge of Cultivated Ministry is thinking through this framework for each ministry or ministry program undertaken. The following is a sample matrix, which defines a range of options for clarifying ministry objectives based on the six broad categories

identified above. In practice, you will use your precisely defined ministry objective instead of these broad categories.

	Evangelism	Worship	Christian Formation	Pastoral Care	Service	Social Witness
Framing the Context	Defining a target demographic	Identify potential participants	Identify potential participants	Define needs of the congregation	Determine community need	Identify desired policy change
Developing a Ministry Plan	Developing an outreach strategy	Structure, format, location, timing	Location, timing, curriculum	Develop a care plan	Explore options & select the most promising	Policy options reviewed & selected
Implementing and Refining	Outreach campaign & collect feedback	Lead worship & collect feedback	Offer classes & collect feedback	Provide care & collect feedback	Launch pilot & collect feedback	Community organizing & collect feedback
Scaling and Sustaining	Ongoing outreach & assimilation	Communication & sustainability plan	Communication & leadership structure	Ensure comprehensive coverage	Resources & organization to scale	Campaign of pressure & communication

For examples of clarified ministry objectives, see [Appendix C](#).

2) Customize Learning Questions

Learning questions help the leader(s) gain the knowledge and insight needed to heighten the impact of the ministry in each successive cycle. Each potential ministry or program fits into one of the intersecting boxes of the preceding chart. For each, it is incumbent on the ministry leader to *create* the learning questions that will lead to meaningful metrics for assessment. These questions should encompass not only the achievement of the ministry objectives but also assess fruitfulness and impact relative to the theological framework of the ministry, program, or project. For programmatic elements within a larger context of ministry, answers to these questions should provide insight as to how this program or ministry is advancing the overall mission of the organization.

Let's consider learning questions for the *Implementing and Refining* stage as it relates to the worship service mentioned above. Learning questions will help us assess how well we are meeting our stated objective:

To create a faithful and inclusive worship experience which is meaningful to people of all ages, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations living within one mile of our sanctuary.

Example learning questions might be:

- What are the demographics of those attending our worship service?
- How many of our current worshippers live within one mile of our sanctuary?
- How many people (overall) live within one mile of our sanctuary? Who are they?

- Do worship participants experience worship as “faithful and inclusive?” How do worship participants find “meaning” in worship? How well does this worship experience create meaning?

For additional examples of learning questions, see [Appendix D](#).

3) Determine Measurement Methods

Determine the data you will collect to answer the learning questions. Remember: data can be quantitative and qualitative. This step also requires determining the method of data collection. There are many options from which to choose. An abbreviated list might include: review of administrative records, online surveys, face-to-face debriefing with participants, and data generated by outside entities such as municipalities or universities.

To determine measurement methods, take each learning question and identify the relevant data. We’ll take a few of the learning questions from our worship example:

- What are the demographics of those attending our worship service?
 - Over the course of eight weeks, we will collect the following data for each worship service:
 - ▶ total number of attendees,
 - ▶ number of attendees by age cohort (child, youth, young adult, middle adult, older adult),
 - ▶ number of attendees by race,
 - ▶ number of attendees by gender.
- How many people (overall) live within one mile of our sanctuary? Who are they?
 - Using census data for one square mile around our church building, note the total number of people and the categories they fall into that match our criteria above (age, race, gender, etc).
- How do worship participants find “meaning” in worship? How well does this worship experience create meaning?
 - Over the course of eight weeks, we will interview 12-15 different people before and after worship to ask them (before) what they find meaningful in worship and (after) what components of today’s worship service provided that meaning. We will aim for diversity of ages, races, and genders in our interview pools.

For additional examples of metrics, see [Appendix E](#).

Storytelling as Assessment

Storytelling is central to the human experience. Without stories and those who tell them, our ability as humans to effectively build community and transmit culture would be nearly impossible. We depend on the power of stories to help us shape and structure our lives, both collectively and individually.

Stories help us understand where we came from. Stories help us discover where we're going. Stories help us to connect with each other. Stories help us to make meaning of our lives amidst the looming complexity and uncertainty of existence. Stories help define us and set us apart. Stories weave us together in the inextricable web of mutuality that is human society and culture. Stories help us to truly know others and to be truly known ourselves. Perhaps most importantly, stories are how we come to know and experience the reality of God.

For these and many other reasons, the concept of story — the narration of events in the life of a person or the existence of a thing — has been central to the life of the church since the inception of Christianity. At the very heart of the gospel is the story of a God who loves the world. At the heart of Christianity is the story of Jesus Christ, who is the foundation of our faith. At the heart of Christian community is the story of how Christ died and yet lives, which binds us all together in love. Without question, Christians are people of story.

This long history of Christian story and storytelling isn't just important to understanding who we are, it is also pivotal to better communicating what we do and how we live as Christians. The art and practice of storytelling is vital to the work of Cultivated Ministry.

When we make Cultivated Ministry a priority, it becomes clear that not only do we need ways of gathering information about the effectiveness of our ministry, we must also learn to use that information to tell stories that matter — stories of impact and stories of transformation. Without these stories, we can collect all the quantitative data we want, but it won't lead to the deep cultural and organizational adaptations we need to fulfill our mission in rapidly changing contexts.

Grounding our Cultivated Ministry work in both biblical and communal stories better enables faith communities to frame the context of their assessments and evaluations by telling the broader narrative of where we have been, where we are, and where we want to go.

As we seek to increase the fruitfulness of our programs and ministries, we can incorporate storytelling at every step of the process. If we cultivate stories and tell them to one another as we cast our vision, use stories to invite others to join our plans

and projects, reflect on the implementation of our ideas through story, and tell those stories when we evaluate our work, we will create opportunities for greater ownership and deeper connection for every ministry participant and stakeholder.

This ongoing storytelling can take many forms:

- Live storytelling during worship or community events.
- Written stories shared through print and digital media.
- Stories (and pictures) grounding reports of committees to the governing body.
- Stories populating annual reports to flesh out the meaning and impact of a community's work during the year.
- Stories shared in groups of two or three at the start of a committee meeting or bible study to give new depth to the work and deepen relationships among the participants.
- Stories shared during small-group conversations or meet-ups and shared as prayer concerns.

Ongoing storytelling, in all its forms, helps us to better connect our assessment with the everyday realities of the people we are called to serve. Stories make our metrics and statistics come alive in powerful and communal ways.

Consider a yearly report given by the children's ministry committee. The report shares important information and statistics about the expanded family formation gatherings, Vacation Bible School, Sunday school, and the intergenerational mission project that were all new initiatives this year. Wonderful pictures help to make the report come alive. The report concludes with a story about a 9-year-old who was so moved by the experience of participating in the mission project with the food bank that for his birthday, he asked his friends and family to bring cases of water for the food bank instead of presents. His birthday water drive yielded a shipping pallet worth of water — and a 9-year-old served as a disciple of Christ. The story will stick long after the statistics are forgotten.

People need training and experience in telling stories that matter, stories that reveal our deepest desires and needs and passions, stories that connect the people of God to our God story, stories that lead to transformation. People also need training and experience in listening to stories — to see, hear, and deepen our understanding of how Cultivated Ministry matters to the life and health of our communities.

For ideas of how to use storytelling in Cultivated Ministry, please see [Appendix F](#).

Cultivated Ministry in Practice

What does Cultivated Ministry look like in practice? Consider the following case study with accompanying notes in the right column.

First Presbyterian Church is a thriving urban congregation in a major metropolitan area. By most traditional metrics, the youth ministry of this congregation is successful. Overall attendance at youth programs has been increasing for the past five years. Each year a large confirmation class is welcomed into church membership. Youth and parents seem happy and satisfied with the programs and opportunities being offered.

However, the session's youth ministry committee has noticed a troubling trend. Year after year, there is a 60-70% attrition rate between the 8th-grade confirmation class and the high school youth group. Sunday morning attendance among high school students is as healthy and steady and summer mission trips are also well-attended. Yet it is also the case that many of the church's youth stop participating after confirmation. Does this situation — common in many mainline Protestant churches — exemplify bearing fruit that will last?

In discussing this situation, the youth ministry committee came to some important insights. First, they recognized that the confirmation class is the cornerstone of their youth ministry. This is the one program in which almost every child of the congregation participates and therefore represents their greatest opportunity to fulfill the church's mission, voiced in the congregational baptismal vows, to guide and nurture their children and encourage them to be followers of Jesus Christ.

What was not clear to the committee was what impact confirmation has in the faith development of its young people and how to measure it. Is the right metric the active participation in the life of the church after confirmation? If so, the church is failing with most of their youth. The committee didn't like that answer, of course, but more than that, they weren't sure that active participation in the life of the church was the only way — or even the most important way — to measure the impact of their

The **needs** addressed by confirmation are clear (to guide and nurture children as followers of Christ) and the **inputs** (pastoral leadership, volunteers, curriculum, etc.) are easily articulated. The **outputs** are also clear: each year a number of young people are confirmed and join the church.

confirmation program.

The youth ministry committee decided to develop a learning-driven assessment of their confirmation program. They first articulated the purpose of confirmation: the goal of the confirmation program is to develop young people who trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and savior and follow his way in the world as faithful disciples.

They noted that they are in the implementing and refining stage of development.

Consequently, they asked: "In what ways are our youth engaged as disciples of Christ after confirmation?"

Given the presenting issue of youth attrition, they quickly determined that church attendance is not the best metric by which to answer this question. Instead, they developed a plan to meet with as many young people as possible who completed confirmation and who are currently in high school, college, and just beyond college. The goal of these meetings was to generate qualitative data about ways in which these young people are (or are not) living as disciples of Christ in the world.

These meetings confirmed that church attendance among these young people is very low and decreases as they age through high school, college, and beyond. Yet the youth ministry committee heard numerous stories about loving and serving others in the way of Jesus.

Sometimes the young people explicitly connected these examples to their faith and sometimes they didn't. From these stories, which they in turn shared with the congregation, the committee concluded that their confirmation program was in fact having an impact and bearing fruit, even when young people didn't explicitly connect the dots between what they learned in confirmation and the ways in which they were living their lives. Based on this learning, the committee made plans to further refine the confirmation program. Without abandoning their traditional focus on theological concepts or giving up on encouraging ongoing

This is a **clarified ministry objective** (see page 20).

Refer back to page 21 for the **Stage of Implementation** chart.

A customized **learning question** (see page 21).

Two metrics emerge: 1) church attendance; 2) loving and serving in the way of Jesus in their everyday lives

involvement in congregational life, the committee added an emphasis on Christian living and how to explicitly articulate these practices as expressions of faith confirmation curriculum.

As the youth ministry committee reflected on the numerous meaningful conversations they had in these relational meetings, the committee members couldn't shake the feeling that this process itself was an act of faith formation. Further, these conversations involved many more youth than were currently served by the youth ministry programs. What if they were to supplement their traditional programmatic form of youth ministry with a more relational approach? What if, instead of measuring attendance at youth programs, they were to measure relational touch-points like they experienced in their fact-finding meetings? Could this greatly expand the reach of their ministry and respond to the challenges of post-Christendom church involvement? Could it even redefine what their congregation understood "church" to be?

This paradigm shift would require a different kind of commitment from their pastoral staff and volunteer leaders. Planning and leading programs is familiar and can be scheduled into busy lives. Building relationships outside of church programs is more challenging and time-consuming. Not all of the volunteers were sure about this new approach. The youth ministry committee decided to try a six-month pilot program of relational youth ministry.

Together, the team — the youth ministry committee, pastoral staff, and volunteers — agreed that, for the next six months, each volunteer would commit to reaching out to the youth who were not attending the church's high school programs — not to invite them back to church but to simply be in relationship with them. Along the way, they would keep records of every time they sent a social media message, had a face-to-face encounter, or attended an extra-curricular event for these youth. At the end of the six-month period, they would compare these records to their program attendance statistics to see if this new approach was a meaningful and fruitful expansion of their ministry. They would consider whether they needed to prune traditional programs in order to

This is an example of learning for growth and improvement.

This is a great example of learning for innovation.

make time for relational ministry. They would also share stories with each other to reflect on whether these relational contacts constituted ongoing faith formation and discipleship. They would identify strengths and challenges of this approach. Based on this evaluation, they would decide whether to continue this kind of ministry and how to make it sustainable if they do.

You can see the **mutual accountability** process in action here.

In this example of Cultivated Ministry, the youth ministry committee of First Presbyterian Church moved beyond the traditional metrics of membership and attendance to think about their ministry in new and creative ways. They found alternative means of recognizing and measuring impact. They developed innovative new ways of communicating to their congregation their mission and what success looks like, which helped them make a strong case for volunteer and financial support.

We want to be good stewards of the resources God has entrusted to us, and we want for our efforts to share the good news of the gospel and to care for those in need to have a meaningful impact on the lives of others. Cultivated Ministry offers an integrated approach to engage theology, accountability, learning, and storytelling in our quest to bear fruit that will last.

We pray this resource will be helpful to you as you seek to deepen and strengthen ministry, to gain clarity about the theological grounding and tangible impact of your ministry, and to enhance your ability to tell stories of God's transformation that matter in people's lives and the world. As we said at the start, Cultivated Ministry is primarily a commitment to four interlocking means of assessment, evaluation, and (re)design aimed at nurturing thoughtful expressions of God's mission in the world.

As you will have gathered by this point, there is no one place to start. You might choose to start with storytelling, or by using the language of inputs, outputs, and impacts to report on specific ministries in your context. Perhaps you'll challenge ministry leaders to clearly articulate the *why* and *so that* of their ministry areas.

As this guide is used across the Church, we will be placing additional resources and accompanying materials on our website, www.nextchurch.net. Most importantly, we hope you will start somewhere and gradually use the tools of this field guide to increase and sharpen the learning that accompanies the work you are doing and ultimately, the health and vitality of the witness you are offering to Jesus Christ in your community.

If you have stories to share from using this resource or have feedback that might help us to improve this guide, please send it to info@nextchurch.net.

Appendix A

Outputs & Impacts

If it is important, it can be measured.

Outputs are the direct results of the application of inputs to a need. Here are some examples of outputs you might consider and that might spark your imagination beyond the outputs we traditionally measure:

- Worship attendance by age group (and frequency of attendance).
- Significant contact with church on weeks not physically present (live streaming worship service, connecting with small group, reading a daily devotion, etc).
- Number of people you know the name of within the community.
- Number of individual meetings done with other members of the community.
- Number of meals delivered to families with new babies or with members recovering from surgery.
- Breadth of diversity of up front or positional leadership.
- Number of new leaders developed during a program year or project.
- Number and variety of different people involved in shared worship leadership.

Impacts help us articulate why we are doing this ministry. Try the “so that” exercise and think theologically while you do.

“We are doing (output) *so that* (impact) happens.”

For example,

We are hosting regular fellowship gatherings (output) this season *so that* more participants in the life of the church expand the number of people they know (impact) *so that* they are more deeply connected to the community (impact).

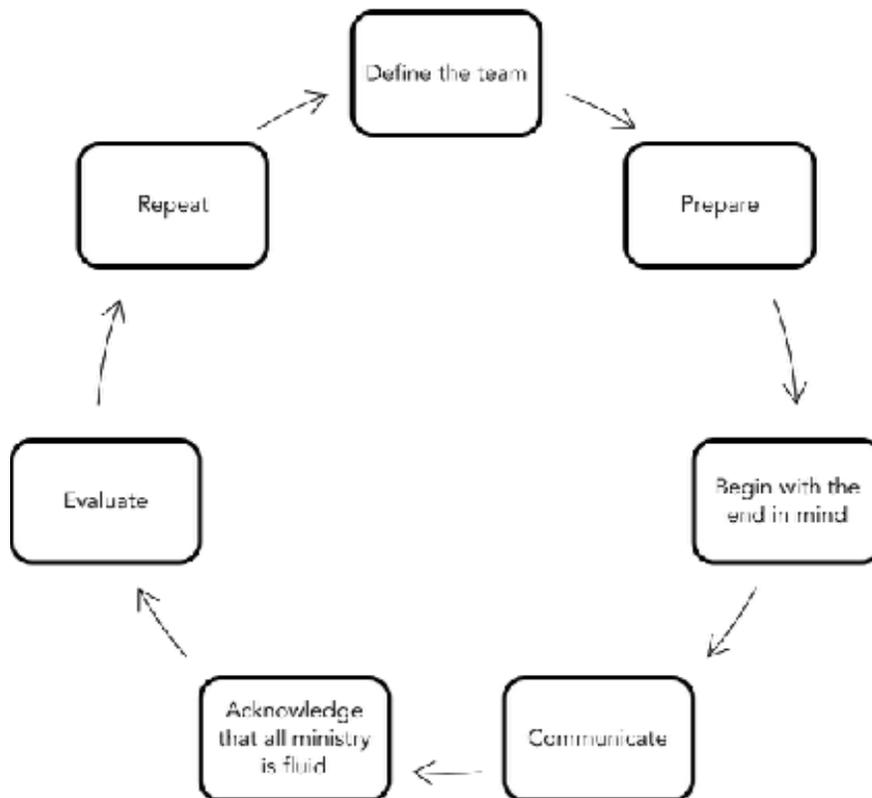
We are shifting from a church pantry model to a discount food store model (output) *so that* members of our community who are food insecure have a reliable place to come shop for food that is fresh (impact), meets their personal dietary restrictions and preferences (impact), offers food at a below market rate (impact), and offers them the dignity of paying for the food they need and want (impact).

Youth consistently and actively participate in worship (output) *so that* they remain connected to a worshipping community in their college age/young adult years (impact).

Appendix B

Suggestions for Mutual Accountability

Many of these concepts are drawn from the practices of community organizing. For more training on community organizing principals and tools for evaluation, please contact an Industrial Areas Foundation organizer in your area (industrialareasfoundation.org).



Define the team: Who is involved in this effort?

Perhaps it's an internal effort, in which case it is important to define those who participate directly in the ministry.

- Congregational leaders
- The intended "audience" (worshippers, students, social outreach participants, etc.)
- People who engage the church in some way (groups who share space in the building, preschool families, etc.)

Perhaps it's an external effort, such as between institutional partners. Each of these partners should have a stake in the ministry.

- Grant-making organizations

- Congregations or other church bodies such as presbyteries or synods
- Public entities such as school systems, city governments, or police departments
- Community groups and neighborhood associations

Prepare: Before the program or project begins, partners identify a process for mutual accountability and develop shared expectations.

- How will planning be handled?
- What roles are we each assuming?
- What reaction do we want from this action?
- What are we trying to achieve through this program?
- What learning objectives do we have? (see “Learning as Assessment”, pg. 19)
- What resources are we committing to this project?

Begin with the end in mind: Agree upon assessment measures.

- What do we hope to learn? (see “Learning as Assessment”)
- What metrics are important? (see “Learning as Assessment”)
- What participant feedback will be important?
- What information do we want to track?

Communicate: Agree upon a communication format.

- How often will formal communication take place?
- What form will the communication take?

Acknowledge that all ministry is fluid: It’s about living water, so expect changes as the project/program is implemented.

- Make sure the intended reactions/objectives are still correct and shared.
- If they need to be changed, go back through the process to make sure people are on the same page.

Evaluate: Discuss how the event/program went.

- After every ministry event/program, take 15 minutes to evaluate with those on the team and any of the participants who might stick around to offer feedback.
 - Be intentionally brief with this so that people don’t quit the discipline or immediately go into problem solving.
 - Going around the room, ask participants to share one word or phrase that describes how they are feeling. This registers the energy in the room, invites honest sharing about the experience, and helps people notice the range of reactions and emotions that are possible.
 - Review the goals/intended reactions/stated objectives and then assess if they were met.
 - Pay attention to the development of the ministry team as well:
 - ▶ Did we have strong showing from leaders?
 - ▶ Were new leaders created from this?

- ▶ How many people attended? (Write this down.)
- ▶ Any logistical details we want to remember for next time?
- ▶ Any research actions we need to take before moving forward?
- ▶ From any frustrations or learnings, do we need any teaching coming out of this so that our leaders continue to grow and so that we grow in shared vision?
 - Do we need deeper evaluation?
 - Who do we need to thank?
- A similar process (with a longer block of time) can be used to evaluate a longer-term effort, like a program year or an entire season of worship.

Repeat: Go back to the theological framework.

- What does fruitfulness look like in this ministry?
- Do we still have the energy and the appetite to work on this? Consider voting on this to allow people to share in the ownership.
 - If not, how do we share the learnings from this ministry and close out our work in a way that is transparent and honoring of the time invested? Don't be afraid to say, "This didn't really get the reaction we had hoped." Or, "This did achieve a great result, but let's talk about how that might be different from what we set out to do."
 - If so, ask the group who might be willing to lead this the next time, and who is committing to be part of the effort.

Appendix C

Clarifying the Ministry Objectives

A single sentence that describes the objective of the ministry in a precise way will result in greater learning and more significant impact. Christian ministry is commonly categorized into six broad categories. Below are examples of well-defined objectives for each of these categories, followed by smaller objectives that attempt to articulate a single component of ministry under the broader category. These have a particular stage of implementation in mind. The example objectives are not intended to be taken word-for-word but to offer ideas for how to frame a clarified ministry objective for a particular setting, context, or project.

Evangelism

Overall clarified ministry objective: Members of this congregation will confidently share the good news of Jesus Christ in conversation with people in the church, in their families, places of work/school, and neighborhood.

- **Frame the Context:** Conduct an analysis of the demographics and faith community connections of families enrolled in the congregation's preschool program.
- **Develop Ministry Plan:** Design a 36-hour biblical storytelling retreat for the children and their families to integrate the biblical story and the stories of their own lives.
- **Implement and Refine:** Launch a "ride to worship" program that connects church attendees with 10-15 residents of the assisted living facility in town.
- **Scale and Sustain:** Permanently change worship to incorporate a testimony experience in weekly worship for people to practice sharing and hearing the good news of Jesus Christ.

Worship

Overall clarified ministry objective: To create a faithful and inclusive worship experience that is meaningful to people of all ages, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations living within one mile of our sanctuary.

- **Frame the Context:** Hold a listening campaign with families of elementary-aged children about their how they find meaning in worship.
- **Develop Ministry Plan:** Design an intergenerational worship service to be used on fifth Sundays that actively includes people of all ages.
- **Implement and Refine:** Develop a group of 5-7 people for consistent 15-minute meetings after the worship service to evaluate the service for a period of six weeks.

- Scale and Sustain: Hire a part-time staff member to sustain the evening worship service added to the schedule to support worship for a particular demographic.

Christian Formation

Overall clarified ministry objective: Participants in the life of this congregation will develop and deepen their faith (in belief and practice) from birth to death.

- Frame the Context: Identify those in the congregation who have retired from full-time work and still able to be active (mentally and physically).
- Develop Ministry Plan: Develop a seasonal meeting schedule for stay-at-home parent's group.
- Implement and Refine: Meet with parents and kids in the elementary aged Sunday school to evaluate the new schedule and curriculum.
- Scale and Sustain: Create a leadership team of advisors and youth to oversee the programs for youth ministry.

Pastoral Care

Overall clarified ministry objective: Regular participants in the life of this congregation will be cared for during major life transitions or events.

- Frame the Context: Define what is meant by “major life transitions or events” (birth, wedding, divorce, surgery/illness, graduation, etc.).
- Develop Ministry Plan: Develop a mentor network between high school seniors and young adults as the seniors approach graduation.
- Implement and Refine: Launch a home-cooked meal program for families with new babies.
- Scale and Sustain: Regularly update church database with pastoral care “touches” and regularly review the data for gaps in care.

Service

Overall clarified ministry objective: Every child at the neighborhood elementary school will have access to healthy food on a regular basis.

- Frame the Context: In partnership with the local school, determine the number of students without adequate food access and the type of food needed.
- Develop Ministry Plan: Develop a community garden where parents in the local school can grow fruits and vegetables to supplement their family's food needs.
- Implement and Refine: Launch “backpack ministry” to provide children in one kindergarten class with food to feed families of four over the weekend and assess how that impacts children's access to food.

- Scale and Sustain: Partner with the local farmer's market to allow for the acceptance of EBT cards to purchase food.

Social Witness

Overall clarified ministry objective: Members of this congregation actively engage within the congregation, local community, state, and nation to seek policies that exhibit justice and love.

- Frame the Context: Develop a listening campaign to talk with teachers at the local school about their needs to successfully educate children.
- Develop Ministry Plan: Conduct a research action to understand the local zoning and development regulations that affect affordable housing in your community.
- Implement and Refine: Collect stories and quantitative data of people in need of more adequate dental care for presentation at a city council meeting.
- Scale and Sustain: Develop a network of churches, non-profits, attorneys, and businesses who are allies in the work to provide sanctuary for immigrants and refugees.

Appendix D

Developing Learning Questions

This framework has been adapted from McKinsey and Company’s “Learning for Social Impact” resource.

	Evangelism	Worship	Christian Formation	Pastoral Care	Service	Social Witness
Framing the Context	Defining a target demographic	Identify potential participants	Identify potential participants	Define needs of the congregation	Determine community need	Identify desired policy change
Developing a Ministry Plan	Developing an outreach strategy	Structure, format, location, timing	Location, timing, curriculum	Develop a care plan	Explore options & select the most promising	Policy options reviewed & selected
Implementing and Refining	Outreach campaign & collect feedback	Lead worship & collect feedback	Offer classes & collect feedback	Provide care & collect feedback	Launch pilot & collect feedback	Community organizing & collect feedback
Scaling and Sustaining	Ongoing outreach & assimilation	Communication & sustainability plan	Communication & leadership structure	Ensure comprehensive coverage	Resources & organization to scale	Campaign of pressure & communication

In **framing the context**, the types of learning questions might include:

- What is the true nature of the context/condition? Has it been fully defined?
- Are root causes of any observed problems known and understood?
- Have target constituents or participants been identified?
- Is there a desire for such a ministry among the target constituents?
- Are we the first to try this ministry or are there learnings from other attempts by us or someone else?
- Is our understanding complete enough to move to the next step of developing a ministry plan?

In **developing a ministry plan**, learning questions might include:

- How closely does the proposed ministry meet needs/desires/expectations of constituents?
- Does this proposed ministry draw on learnings from similar ministries or other programs?
- Is the short- and long-term impact of this ministry plan greater than alternatives we might consider?
- Do we have the resources to effectively engage in this particular ministry?
- How large a pilot effort is needed and how long do we need in order to assess our impact?

At the **implementation and refining** stage, learning questions might include:

- How are the target constituents or participants responding to the ministry?
- Does the ministry successfully address the needs/desires/expectations defined earlier?
- Have there been any negative or unintended consequences as a result of this ministry?
- Does our assessment justify continuing or increasing the scale of this ministry?
- Is the ministry cost effective and sustainable if we go to scale?

At the **scaling and sustaining** stage, learning questions are smaller in scope and tend to be focused on incremental improvement for internal assessment. However, for telling the story of the ministry and for communicating with external constituencies, the same measures that are used in implementation and refining practice should be maintained over time.

Appendix E

Develop Appropriate Metrics

The **metrics** associated with the various stages of learning driven assessment are derived from the specific learning questions themselves. For example, if there is a desire to serve young people or neighbors experiencing homelessness, it is very useful to define a metric that actually counts the target population. In contrast, meaningfulness of worship may be best approached through survey methods. Often, combining quantitative and qualitative metrics can create the most compelling picture into which individual stories can be grafted.

McKinsey defines three basic types of data and metrics in the social services arena:

1. A scientific approach that relies on experimental or observational design.
2. Quantitative methods that include statistical and regression analysis combined with benchmarking.
3. Primary and secondary data collection such as interviews, surveys and administrative data review.

This last category is the one most likely to be of greatest use in the ministry context. For most ministry contexts, a combination of administrative data and direct participant feedback is likely the most compelling, effective, and available information for assessment. Emphasis should be placed on what is readily available, what is easily obtainable, and what will provide the insight to answer the learning questions.

For congregational ministries such as worship, Christian formation, and pastoral care, consider using records that contain specific data such as membership, stewardship, and attendance. For external outreach, there is often publicly available information from city planning, school, and police departments, which can be geographically defined. Combining this administrative data with direct constituent feedback and data from ministry operations (i.e. number of individuals served, or meals prepared or room nights provided) is usually all that is needed to answer most learning questions.

Appendix F

Storytelling Prompts

Story is at the heart of Christian faith. Stories help us understand God and ourselves. They connect us more deeply to one another and make meaning for our lives. The art and practice of storytelling is vital to the work of Cultivated Ministry and can be incorporated into multiple aspects of community life. Here are a few ideas of how to incorporate story and some prompts to get you started. As you develop your own prompts, think about whether the story intends to get at learning or changed behavior (a more formal part of assessment) or serves as a means to deepen relationships and put meaning to activities of your ministry. The prompt will be different, depending on your aim.

A gathering of teachers and/or youth advisors

Tell a story about a time when you unexpectedly connected with a kid/youth/adult this year.

Tell a story about a time a person who is often excluded was included.

Tell a story about something that surprised you this year.

Tell us about the most meaningful lesson/bible study/conversation this year. What made it so?

Tell about a time when you felt affirmed in your call to teach in the past year.

As a part of worship

These stories can be told impromptu between people sitting in pews or by someone who has prepared a story to tell the whole congregation.

Tell a story about a time when someone who is often excluded in society was included in your community.

Tell a story about someone who helped to nurture and deepen your faith.

Tell a story about forgiveness/loss/hope/joy/grace, etc.

Tell a story about a time you felt God's presence or had a sense you were treading on holy ground.

As part of a report to session or an annual report

These stories can help illustrate the impact of the work that is being done and the transformative power of the ministry.

Tell a story of a participant in the ministry who did or said something that demonstrates connections between this ministry and their life outside of church.

Tell a story of someone whose life has been changed in a big or small way.

Tell a story about something you learned this year as part of this ministry.

As part of a small group or committee meeting

These can be told in pairs or small groups to help people get to know one another and deepen their commitment to their common work.

Tell a story of a time when a sacrament came alive for you in worship this year.

Tell a story about a time when you learned something new that had a significant impact on you (it could be a world event, a self-revelation, a truth someone told you...).

Tell a story about how you came to be part of this committee/group/church/community.

What makes you stay?

Tell a story about a time you shared what you had, and, in so doing, you made a friend.

Tell a story about the community of people (other than family) who has meant the most to you.

Tell a story about a time when you were welcomed and included.

Works Cited

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Notes:

¹ Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31; 11:24; and 16:5.

² On the complex relationship between church and empire, see Joerg Rieger, *Christ & Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Fortress Press, 2007).

³ For a concise description of the post-WWII high point of American religion, see Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (Simon & Schuster, 2010), 82-89. They go on to describe the subsequent decades of decline on pages 91-133.

⁴ David Roozen, “Negative Numbers: The Decline Narrative Reaches Evangelicals,” *Christian Century* 130, no. 25 (December 11, 2013). For the Pew Research Center’s most recent data on American religiosity, see <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>. For membership decline in the Southern Baptist Church see <http://www.bpnews.net/49005/acp--churches-up-in-2016-baptisms-membership-decline> and <http://www.bpnews.net/47015/baptists-reflections-of-the-stats-guy>. For recent information on megachurch membership and participation see <http://religionnews.com/2015/12/02/megachurch-evangelical-christians/>.

⁵ See Lee Rainie and Berry Wellman, *Networked: The New Social Operating System* (MIT, 2014) and Mark J. Dunkelman, *The Vanishing Neighbor: The Transformation of American Community* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2014).

⁶ Alina Tugend, “Donations to Religious Institutions Fall as Values Change,” *The New York Times* (November 3, 2016), https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/06/giving/donations-to-religious-institutions-fall-as-values-change.html?_r=0.

⁷ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (HarperOne, 2012) and *Grounded: Finding God in the World—A Spiritual Revolution* (HarperOne, 2015).

⁸ <http://benefitcorp.net>.

⁹ Craig Dykstra and James Hudnut-Beumler, “The National Organizational Structures of Protestant Denominations: An Invitation to a Conversation” in *The Organizational Revolution: Presbyterians and American Denominationalism*, edited by Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

¹⁰ On the deficiencies of religious institutions as regulatory agencies and the need for adaptive transformation based on contemporary and ancient models, see Steven Toshio Yamaguchi, “A Model of Spiritual Leadership for Reinventing the Presbytery of Los Ranchos,” DMin thesis, Claremont School of Theology (2007).

¹¹ Data regarding Habitat for Humanity comes from an internal analysis by Frank Spencer (2014).

¹² Dustin C. Read and Alexandra Tsvetkova, “Housing and Social Issues: a Cross-Disciplinary Review of the Existing Literature,” *Journal of Real Estate Literature* 20, no. 1 (2012): 3-37.

¹³ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements* (2nd edition; Brazos Press, 2016).

¹⁴ Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8; John 15:8, 16.

¹⁵ Mark 1:15, CEB.

¹⁶ Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:1-15.

¹⁷ Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19.

¹⁸ Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21.

¹⁹ Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (Jossey-Bass, 2009).

²⁰ Darrell L. Guder (ed.), *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Eerdmans, 1998) and Darrell L. Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology* (Eerdmans, 2015).

²¹ John 15:1-2, CEB.

²² Matthew 9:37.

²³ <http://www.mckinsey.com> McKinsey’s mission is to bring an objective, fact-based approach to their work in order to strengthen their clients’ ability to deliver meaningful and sustainable change. Their work supports both granting organizations and service organizations in bringing often disparate needs into alignment.

²⁴ <http://mckinseysociety.com/learning-for-social-impact-report/>.