

INNOVATIVE IDEAS FOR A HARD SEASON

This study guide is designed to provide questions that incite discussion, invite reflection, and inspire action. It was written to accompany The Moderator's Town Hall conversation with Mark DeVries, Founder and President of Ministry Architects and Ministry Incubators.

Timestamps linked to the Town Hall recording are included in this guide, should a discussion leader choose a "pause and talk" approach rather than asking participants to watch the Town Hall in its entirety prior to meeting. This guide can also be utilized across multiple meetings, given that some questions might spark heartier conversation than one meeting will allow.

The video of this Town Hall can be accessed by using the following link: <https://vimeo.com/488640202>

Cultivating the Ground for Innovation

What do you know about the culture and composition of your church, when it comes to new ideas?

@6:13 This month's town hall begins and ends by uplifting the idea that churches need both creativity and structure if they want to move forward. Mark says "we no longer can afford to say, 'some people are these structure people and some people are these innovative people.' We believe... you gotta have them both on your team."

Write down the names of the decisionmakers who are a part of your church leadership.

- **Who often shares ideas and solutions that address systems and processes?**
- **Who, then, gives voice to what would be considered outside-the-box options?**

****If you are unsure, this could be a great opportunity to learn more about the composition of your leadership teams and how your leaders are wired – and chosen.*

@5:43 In expanding upon this idea of moving forward, Mark said, "I think all of us are very clear that the Church of Jesus Christ is not gonna be the same when we're through on the other side of this (pandemic.) ...I don't think there's any chance we're going to bounce back. But there is a chance we'll bounce forward. And I do think the gospel compels us to think forward – to what God is calling us *into* rather than this longing for what came behind."

As you reflect on this past year, what has been lost and gained, when it comes to your experiences of and engagement with your church?

Are you excited for the possibilities ahead or longing for the way church was 'before'?

Where do you think the majority of your church lands as they 'eye' the future? Are more people excited for new possibilities or do they long for what has been?

@6:13 As a part of forward thinking, Mark talked about moving from chaos to stability. He affirmed, "That's the work of systems. But systems will not build momentum. They just give you a platform for momentum."

What gets greater focus in your church: systems and creating / maintaining stability or innovation and creating / building momentum?

When you think about what might draw you, personally, to a church, what's more appealing: a church that rarely changes and is consistently delivering familiar options or one that is ever-evolving and constantly starting new initiatives?

Consider the previous set of questions and how some of your church might be more excited for the new while others are longing for what they have always known.

- How do each of these mindsets affect the stability of a church?
- How does each affect momentum?

Establishing a Process for Innovation

How does a new idea get considered and supported in your church?

@8:46 One of Mark's companies, Ministry Incubators, utilizes an approach to idea execution that has been developed by The Institute of Design at Stanford University. The following are the steps to this process:

- (1) **Listen Deeply** – start by having conversations with those you hope to reach in order to understand, with empathy, the true needs that exist.
- (2) **Define the Problem** – what is the specific challenge that needs addressed?
- (3) **Ideate Multiple Solutions** – *"in creativity language, this is 'divergent thinking'; this is thinking that is unpredictable."* (**@10:44**)
- (4) **Try an Idea** – test a prototype of one of the solutions.
- (5) **Assess and Repeat** – *"Most churches expect their ideas to work. That's a problem. 'Cause new stuff very seldom works. ...You're probably going to have to go through multiple iterations."* (**@11:38**)

What does it look like for you to propose a new idea at your church?

What does it look like to get the church to support new ideas?

As you consider the above process, which steps does your church already do really well? Which step might be more difficult for your church to do consistently? Why?

@12:40 Mark claimed “If you want to create something that has long-term change and innovative impact, you’re gonna probably have to go through multiple iterations.”

Do you find this claim to be encouraging or discouraging? Why?

In what ways is your church equipped to try more than one idea, when aiming to respond to a need / address a problem? In what ways is it ill-equipped?

@13:27 “Often in the church, we just are so quick to think there’s one answer, there’s THE right answer, and we’re in a season now where we don’t really know what the future holds.”

When have you experienced failure with a new idea? What was that like for you?

How did such an experience shape the way you propose other new ideas?

Is there “freedom to fail” in your church?

How does your church leadership respond if an idea “fails” or if something isn’t “working “anymore?

Considering Innovative Ideas

What are some outside-the-box ideas your church could try?

*Throughout much of the remainder of the webinar, participants shared specific ideas that their local congregations are trying, and Mark offered different questions each individual could consider as a part of their process. Some of those conversations might be helpful to you, too. As a group, **feel free to discuss only those ideas that are most fitting for your setting.** After you...*

Read Matthew 28:16-20

The Great Commission doesn't cease to be our call just because the ways in which we've become accustomed to living it out have been disrupted.

How was your church doing before the pandemic at going and making disciples?

And, since the pandemic, how have those ways been disrupted or completely halted?

@15:20 Increasing Attendance

"A lot of churches are finding that people who live out of town have begun "attending" their church... There's some connectivity that... never would have happened apart from the restrictions of the pandemic."

Currently, what trends are you seeing in your church with virtual engagement?

What kind of value would there be for your church to set a goal for virtual connection?

Do you have "digital campuses"? What is your church's plan for multiplying your reach over the next 6-12 months, outside of a hoped-for return to in-person worship?

@16:17 Planning for a Comeback

"If Easter's our comeback day... let's begin right now imagining what that ideal Easter Sunday morning might be to create connectivity. ...on Easter Sunday, not everyone's gonna feel comfortable coming back to church. And, so, multiplying that out is really where the game is."

What kinds of resources are needed to attend to both a full, in-person experience of worship and an online, virtual experience?

What do you believe to be the most impactful ways to reach people, right now?

@21:09 Creating Personalized Connections

"It's a season for listening deeply to what's the obstacle for each person. This is not a season where one size is gonna fit all." Mark then went on to say that whether or not someone finds a worship service compelling, there are many who want to make a difference in the world.

How is your church engaging young adults to connect with one another – or with older adults who might have very little connection, right now?

What are the benefits of creating intentional pathways for personal connection?

How does this personalized approach align with what we see Jesus do in the gospels?

@24:54 Sustaining Real Estate

"We have imagined a sort of Christianity that's tied to the Christendom that has been crystallized in the form of buildings. ...And when we think about, particularly millennials and younger, they are much less concerned with, much less enthusiastic about investing in buildings. I don't think buildings will go away. ...But I do think part of what the Spirit may be

doing in this season ... is that God is moving us more into a house church kind of way of doing church. Almost like a global house church."

What do you think of this shift away from a building-centric approach to discipleship?

How would your church care for and reach people without its building?

@26:54 Mark refers to a group of young people who have more than one congregation as "ecclesiological polygamists."

What do you think of this approach to engaging with the Church?

Is there room for ecclesiological polygamists in your congregation? If not, why?

@27:30 Paul and Mark discuss the amount of real estate owned by the Church today. Mark then asks the question: "*How do we best repurpose our brick-and-mortar buildings so that we're not spending all of our time trying to get people to come to our meetings and complaining about the kids spilling Kool-Aid on the carpet?*" In other words,

What are some different ways your church building, or the resources poured into the care of your brick-and-mortar properties, could be used during this time?

@27:30 Living Missionally

In sharing a story of innovation from western North Carolina, Mark characterized the projects as "outward facing" meaning "serving the community – not spending all of our energy getting people to come in our doors."

In what ways does your church care for the people who are already a part of it?

In what ways does your church plan and care for those who aren't yet engaged with it?

@33:25 Engaging New People

"What most people are longing for in this time is (connection / engagement) – we're just feeling so isolated. We're feeling so cut off from each other."

What are the greatest needs the people of your church are experiencing right now?

What are the greatest needs the people of your community are experiencing right now?

In what ways are those lists the same and in what ways are they different?

In comparing, where do you see opportunities for your church to take a next step toward connecting with and engaging new people?

@40:15 Reshaping Perception

"Part of what people believe about a church is 'the church always wants something out of me.' ...How would it be if there was just a gift at a door that...you could say, 'We want you to know that we are for you... and if we can serve you in any way, here's our number.'?"

Think of the neighborhood where your church is located.

What do you believe are some commonly held perceptions about your church?

What kinds of experiences have your church's neighbors had with the church?

What kinds of resources might be needed for your church to reach out and offer a gift, like the one described above, to your community? (keeping in mind, of course, COVID-19 protocols)

In his presentation, Mark encouraged us to know the names of the five closest neighbors to our church building. Do you know those names? If not, what's a next step for you and others to discover those in closest proximity to your church property?

Jesus' Discipleship Training Plan

How do the ways in which you approach new ideas impact your church's ability to move forward?

As the webinar drew to a close, Mark went from a broader, systems-level vantage point to one of personal reflection and how individuals can impact a cultural change in the church.

@48:56 Embracing Resilience in Failure

@52:56 Feeling Awkward

@54:54 Dumb Persistence

@56:41 Managing Change

@58:35 Being a Non-Anxious Presence

@1:02:14 Telling Stories

As you consider each one of the above encouragements, which one is easiest for you to live into? Which one might be more difficult for you?

Find a New Testament story where Jesus or one of His disciples exhibited each of the above.

*"Wouldn't it be cool if the reputation were, 'You wanna get something done in this town? Well go to the church. The Church of the Brethren – they make things happen in our town.'" | **Mark DeVries**, pondering the potential impact of a church that embraces innovative ideas." **@1:06:36***