

***Entering the Same Door, Differently:  
Empowering the Present and Imagining the Future through  
Post-Pandemic Exploration and Personal Stories***

Designs/Formats/Outlines for  
Guided Conversational Retreat/Reflection Sessions  
In-Person, Online, or Hybrid

April 2021

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# Entering the Same Door, Differently: Empowering the Present and Imagining the Future through Post-Pandemic Exploration and Personal Stories

## Introduction

General conversations, and certainly social media threads, indicate that we live in a culture that thrives on negative feelings and thoughts. It's as if the goal is to out-darken others' experiences: Whatever your story is, mine is far worse. The guided conversational retreat and/or reflection sessions in this packet are different: They are designed to bring light into our darkness. Just as a plant will wither and die in a dark, neglected corner, the same plant can thrive again with positive attention and will turn its leaves toward the light. We, too, can thrive again with the appropriate self-attention and life-giving light, as we assemble the positive pieces of our personal stories, learning from and with each other to create a realistic and affirming plan for today and for the future.

Albert Einstein said, essentially, that we can't fix a situation by maintaining the same mind-set that created it. Carl Jung told us that we don't really solve problems, we outgrow them as something more urgent takes their place. And author Joseph Jaworski awakens us to the way we use our words to form our thoughts, opinions, and actions. He says that we create our world through the language we use: *To put it another way, we do not describe the world we see, but we see the world we describe.*

The sessions in this packet are designed to change consciousness and build positive self-awareness, individually and collectively. We seek to focus less on what went wrong, and more on what has gone well, what new and promising adaptations we have already developed, and what we dream for the future that lies ahead. We will work together to use the affirmative power of our own stories to frame our responses away from PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder, to PTG, post-traumatic growth. Through conscious choice, we can move from suffering to resilience, from coping to overcoming, from hurting to growing. [adapted from Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004] Together, we can live better today and prepare for the future, by developing new strengths, skills, habits, core values, and positive world-view.

*We offer these materials at no charge and hope you will adapt and appropriate them for in-person/virtual/ hybrid participation in faith communities, as well as civic, non-profit, and other organizations that wish to use them.*

**Using experienced small-group facilitators to navigate these conversations is strongly recommended.**

## ***The Design Team:***

We are long-term colleagues with significant experience, individually and collectively, in creating materials for and facilitating adult theological reflection and Christian education modules for group process. We cover the US from the East Coast, the South, the Midwest, the West, and the West Coast. Each member of this design team has contributed to the package as a whole. **Feel free to contact us individually or collectively with questions or comments.**

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## **Section I**

### **Entering a Post-Pandemic World: A Theological Framework to Guide Decisions** by Richard Brewer

Throughout our country, if not throughout the world, minds turn to consider what kind of life will we have after the Pandemic. A post-pandemic world likely will still have Covid 19 and its variants present but, hopefully, in a less debilitating manner. As we envision the immediate future, what do our theological heritages have to contribute in shaping the anticipated world? How might theology provide a framework as we make decisions about our lives?

Theology covers a spectrum of knowing. Initially, three theological domains have much to offer: political theology, theological ethics, and aesthetical theology. Political theology deals with how society relates primary theological issues such as justice, institutional reform, and the quality of life lived in the public realm. Theological ethics address questions about how we should, ought, and even must behave toward one another and how our decisions impact our relationship with God. Aesthetical theology looks to the arts in finding ways to create theological meaning. Artists have the potential to serve as modern-day prophets whenever they show us where we've been, who we are, and what we can become.

Five critical channels contain theological resources. They are framed primarily around five outlooks. From the outside looking in, people tend to see religious faith as primarily concerned with belief and behavior. Believe this! Do that! Too often three other outlooks are ignored or repressed. Questions, wonderings, and doubts fuel theological thought disclosing interests and curiosities. Additionally, yearnings, desires, and longings stimulate theology. Deep thirsts and hungers shape how one seeks and knows reality. Theologically, our desires fashion what we want and even expect from God and from others. Lastly, we explore what might be (the what if's) as we imagine what could be. Thought experiments carried out in our imaginations shape our dreams and hopes for the future.

Philosophical theologians, especially Charles Taylor, point to our corporate identities. The selves that are "we" are formed by the stories, symbols, champions (aka saints), and legends/folk tales that we hold in common. Commonly held perspectives, attitudes, and assumptions establish legitimacy and social identity. How can we find unity within diversity without violence? In a fragmented society, each splinter-group protectively embraces preferred and trusted ways of knowing and viewing reality. Each fragment of society values the stories, symbols, heroes, and social media that define their corporate identity. Our challenge is how to build bridges that foster communication across the divides. How to live together within the differences and divisions is a major issue as we envision a post-pandemic world. Every social institution has been impacted by the pandemic. What do we want to continue and what do we want to leave behind as we move into the future? What will it take to flourish as a society, what resources are available, how is God actively present, and how can we move into a desired vision of the future?

## Key Theological Positions for Living in a Post-pandemic World

- Reflecting on a post-pandemic world leads to practicing a form of political theology. Political as modifier for theology refers to the broad understanding of social life in all its dimensions. We attend to the corporate concerns gathered around the identity of selves that are “We.”
- Theological ethics is closely related to political theology. Theological ethics centers on the questions of what must, should, or ought to be done in relationship to God.
- Discerning God’s Dream for our common life means that we strive to notice what and how God is working among and within all of us.
- Seeing our work as theological means that God is actively involved in human history and is a manifestation of God’s involvement with history.
- As people talk together about what kind of world we desire and decide what actions one can, should, or must take, that activity becomes one way in which we participate in God’s ongoing creating, redeeming, and sanctifying.
- Charles Taylor uses the term *social imaginary* to refer to the way people actually imagine their social surrounding. It is made of stories, legends, and values shared by large groups of people. Common understanding makes possible common practices --- as shared sense of legitimacy.
- Essentially our work is a profound engagement of individual and social imagination. We seek to bring people into imaging social existence; how we fit together with others.
- The Japanese American artist and theologian Makoto Fujimura calls people into cultural care. In his work he seeks to work with “anyone who feels the cultural divide, especially those with a desire or an artistic gift to reach across boundaries with understanding, reconciliation, and healing.” The artistic presence in all its forms is central, if not essential, to recreating and restoring a healthy culture.
- Social regeneration is a process of divine-human mutuality. Daniel Hardy used a medical term “granulation,” a process of healing from underneath a wound, as the tissue is knitted together afresh. Hardy took this process as a metaphor for God’s ability to heal society’s deep wounds.
- Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, a professor at Johns Hopkins University, in *The Life of Imagination: The Revealing and Making of the World*, brings imagination center stage. “Imagination arises in and through conscious life and aims toward material and symbolic expression. Imagination does not only operate in the isolated mind, as one fantasizes, eyes shut closed to the world, or in the rare ecstatic moment. **Imagination allows us to take up the stuff of the world and of the mind and transform it, and as such it is essential to human flourishing.**” (emphasis added.)

## **Section 2**

### **Just Imagine: What Was, What Might Be** by Angela Hock and Michael Cunningham

**Purpose:** Identify impact of COVID-tide on individuals and congregation; begin moving toward growth as people and as a Faith Community.

**Goals:** claim COVID effects in personal and corporate life; identify learning, choices, changes. Create a beginning action plan for new life as individuals and as a worshipping community.

**Opportunity:** two sessions of three hours each; in-person, online, or hybrid, for a one or two-day meeting

**Group Size:** depends on how/where the meetings occur. If the group is larger than eight people, form smaller groups of 3-5 for some of this design.

#### **Materials needed:**

\*Bibles

\*paper, writing implements

\*4" x 4" sticky notes (or something that can be attached safely on a wall)

\*large writing surface (whiteboard, chalkboard, newsprint) if meeting in person.

-*If meeting virtually:* comfort in using program accessories such as shared screen/whiteboard will be helpful.

> *For first session:* Encourage participants to bring a "favorite" mask from the past year

*Some thoughts from the designers:*

~ For this work we strongly recommend using Leaders/Facilitators with experience supporting small groups in meaningful conversations.

~Keeping within timeframes will positively benefit the work and allow these early efforts to be productive.

**Working Premise:** We've been apart so long that we almost have to learn how to be with each other again. Our shared experience can support us into the future.

## SESSION ONE

### *First Hour:*

Suggested Opening Worship – From *A Disciples Prayer Book, In the Morning*, pp 5-6.  
[available from <https://www.forwardmovement.org/Products/2315/a-disciples-prayer-book.aspx>]

-*Listen* to the Gospel of the day (or a relevant scripture passage) three times read by three different readers – participants then identify words, ideas, sentences that stand out for them.

Ask: what is Jesus saying? What does Jesus/the Gospel call you to do?

-*Welcome, present Purpose and Goals, timeline for the meetings*

-*Agree on group interaction practices per norms [see appendix for suggested group norms]*  
-use a “two-minute drill” to hear and record responses, unpack those offered, add one or two if needed. Invite group agreement to these guidelines.

-*Share introductions* – keep it light, keep it moving: “My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I was baptized in (name year and location). This is my favorite mask because \_\_\_\_\_.”

Brief break

### *Second Hour:*

-In groups of 3-5, spend up to 45 minutes sharing responses to the following:

*As you consider your personal life this past year:*

- \* what did you have to sacrifice
- \* what will you choose to leave behind
- \* what will you struggle to protect
- \* what gives you hope

-If the group divided into smaller groups, return to the full group to discuss a) what the stories had in common; b) what was encouraging in what you heard

Brief break

### *Third Hour:*

**I. Read the following Gospel story and talk about how that story connects to the story of your church community in the past year – highlight verbs. Record the verbs for all to see.**

*Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>23</sup> After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup> and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. <sup>25</sup> Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. <sup>26</sup> When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. <sup>27</sup> But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." <sup>28</sup> "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." <sup>29</sup> "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. <sup>30</sup> But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" <sup>31</sup> Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" <sup>32</sup> And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. <sup>33</sup> Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." (Matthew 14:22-33, NRSV)*

>Share thoughts in response to:

\*who is the story about?

\*how does the story speak to the experience in our worship community this past year?

**II. Prepare three large sheets of paper or have three blank pages available in Zoom or another meeting platform. Label the sheets: 1) *What We Have Sacrificed*, 2) *What We Will Choose to Leave Behind*, 3) *What We Will Struggle to Protect***

Consider the above three areas in terms of the past year in the life of your church community. Each participant writes a response to each caption on a separate sticky note (face-to-face groups) or other paper if in Zoom.

\**Face-to-Face Group*: Each person places their responses on the corresponding sheets.

\**Virtual Group*: each person answers using the "Chat" feature (if on Zoom) and facilitator saves the Chat to print and use the following day.

### **Responses will be part of the work of Session Two**

#### **III. Closing Prayer**

Loving God, we pray for this church community in this time of crisis. Deliver us from simply desiring to go "back to normal," and give us grace instead to be open to the opportunities that your Spirit brings in this time of separation. Grant that we may come out of this crisis with open eyes, more fully available to the needs of those most vulnerable and those whose labor we have always depended on. Give us creative hearts to embrace and carry forward the new ways we have found to connect with one another; and in your good time bring us safely back together as a people renewed in the knowledge of your faithfulness and abiding love and strengthened for the work ahead. We pray in the name of Jesus. *Amen.* (Kathleen Staudt)

## SESSION TWO

**Goal:** by the end of the day, we will create a beginning action plan; we don't have to do things as we've always done them.

### *First Hour*

-*Opening liturgy* – something appropriate to the group's particular faith tradition or denomination.

-*A suggested prayer: Collect for Hope during the Covid-19 Pandemic* (Alejandra Trillos): Bountiful God, source of the greatest good for all of us: Guide us in the right direction towards a better future for your creation. Help us to overcome our own limitations during this pandemic, and grant us steadfast love to look after each other. Give us humbleness of heart to accept that without you we cannot be real stewards of your creation. Show us ways to spread the gospel that will touch hearts and change minds for a better tomorrow for all humanity, the preservation of every creature, and the planet. In the name of your beloved Son, we ask it. *Amen.*

-*Review the three sheets or chat responses* from the previous meeting:

- \*What your worshipping community has had to sacrifice because of COVID;
- \*What you might want to leave behind;
- \*What you will struggle to protect.

-*Talk about* what seems important in the thoughts that people shared.

### Brief Break

### *Second Hour*

-*In sub-groups of five or fewer for 30 minutes:* Record responses in terms of the life of the local congregation:

\*We affirm: \_\_\_\_\_

\*We know that we must: \_\_\_\_\_

\*We wonder: \_\_\_\_\_

\*And we doubt: \_\_\_\_\_

\*So, we pray for the possibility of: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Because our longing is: \_\_\_\_\_

-*Share* small group responses in full group

### Brief Break

*Third Hour – You are not alone*

*-In a few minutes of quiet, think, pray, and write about:*

\*What you want for the Faith Community you love

\*What you are going to do to help

*-Return to the “walking on water” story – after talking with one another during this event, share thoughts on the new wisdom you gather from the story.*

\*How is Jesus in the boat with you, the Church?

\*What will it take for you to “walk on water” to Jesus, to sail in the boat with Jesus, to eat breakfast on the shore with Jesus in the weeks and months that follow for this worshipping community?

*-Now that you know you can walk on water:*

\*How can you share that with others?

\*How can we invite them to walk on water with us.

*-Participants make notes about:*

\*Two actions each hopes to take as an individual

\*Two actions each hopes to take with others in the Body of Christ

*-Make these responses known to the whole group. Be aware of responses that may be shared by several people.*

\*How might that suggest future action?

### **Closing**

-Each person takes a minute to write what they want to say to or ask of God at this time about going forward as a Community of Faith.

-Each offers his or her prayer aloud, if willing.

-Lay the prayers before the empty Cross if in person, or meditatively if virtual

-Exchange the Peace

AMEN.

*Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.*

***You have planted and watered. God will give the growth. You are not alone.***

## An Appreciative Entry into the Post-Pandemic “New Normal”

by Johnna Camp

**Purpose:** To empower people who have lived through shared trauma (in this case the pandemic and confinement); to create a more ideal future through storytelling and appreciating those things that give life.

**Materials:** \*Notepaper, construction paper, modeling clay

\*Writing implements: pens, pencils, markers, crayons, etc.

\*Candles to be given at the conclusion; have lighter or matches

\**If meeting in person:* large writing surface (whiteboard, chalkboard, newsprint/easel, markers).

-*If meeting virtually:* comfort in using program accessories such as shared screen/whiteboard will be helpful.

**Time:** This process will take approximately 6 hours, including breaks and lunch.

### *Morning Session*

**9:00** Gather, settle, welcome, begin with opening prayer:

*Loving Creator, we come to you today asking for your guidance, wisdom, and support as we begin this session. Help us to engage in meaningful discussion; allow us to grow closer as a group and nurture the bonds of community. Fill us with your grace, Lord God, as we seek to heal wounds, let go of pain, look to the future with hope, and imagine what might be. And continue to remind us that all that we do here today, all that we accomplish, is for the pursuit of discovery and growth for the greater glory of You, and for the service of humanity. We ask these things in your name, Amen.*

[adapted from Jim Manney, in addition to other books, he is the author of *A Simple Life-Changing Prayer*]

**Getting started:** *Share purpose and design*, establish expectations and group norms [see appendix for suggested group norms]. (Re)introduce participants by asking them to share what they have most enjoyed or are most looking forward to post-confinement (**10 minutes**)

**9:15** Being honest and examining our experience also means acknowledging the trauma we’ve lived through and releasing the pain it brought us.

-*Take a moment* to think of something or someone you lost or had to give up as a result of the pandemic.

-*Close your eyes* and sit with that loss for a few moments. Notice what you are feeling, physically and emotionally.

-*Take an index card* and write a few words or draw an image that represents your loss.

-*You may name* your loss to the group or hold it in silence.

-*You’ll be invited* to place your card on our altar and to light a candle as a sign of giving your loss to God and allowing the light of Christ to enter that darkness. (**10 minutes**)

**Discovery:** What gives life? *(30 minutes)*

**9:25** Appreciative Interviews

-*Divide the group* into pairs, one listener and one storyteller, and provide the interview guide, below.

\*Individuals will have 15 minutes to share and then will switch roles. Listeners will take notes on the interview summary sheet. *A short break may be taken between interviews.*

-*Interview Guide, Facilitator shares:* The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent period of confinement have been traumatizing in many ways. We want to acknowledge that trauma and process the grief that may have come with it. But we also want to grow from the trauma. These short interviews and the following *appreciative process* will allow us to move from suffering to resiliencing, from coping to overcoming, from hurting to growing. Rather than staying in the pain of what the pandemic has cost us, we want to identify and even celebrate what it has brought us. *Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.* [Helen Keller, American author, disability rights advocate, political activist and lecturer, with no sight or hearing]

-*Ask participants* to think of a time during the confinement when you had the choice of suffering or to overcome what was causing the pain, and you chose to overcome. For example:

- \*What were the circumstances?
- \*Who else was involved?
- \*What were the decisions that had to be made?
- \*What did you do?
- \*What did you feel?
- \*Where did your strength come from?
- \*What did you learn about yourself?"

-*Next*, without being modest, think about:

- \*What do you value most about yourself as a human being?
- \*What are your most important qualities and strengths?
- \*What brings the most meaning to your life?

-*Participants switch roles* after 15 minutes. Once interviews are complete, everyone reconvenes in large group.

**Dream:** What might be? (**2 hours**)

**10:05** Have the following quote visible on a whiteboard or newsprint for everyone to see. Allow a few moments for reflection:

***Freedom is the choice you have between stimulus and response.***

[Victor Frankel, Austrian neurologist, psychiatrist, philosopher, author, and Holocaust survivor]

-*In the large group*, discern actions that lead to personal growth:

\**Invite sharing* of some of the core strengths, values, qualities, and ways of overcoming they heard described.

-*Capture these on newsprint* for everyone to see.

-*If the energy is high* or there is excitement in the room, name it. Keep the momentum going for the allotted time. (*10 minutes*)

**10:20** *Break the group* into smaller teams (no larger than 12)

- *Instruct teams* to creatively depict what they have seen and heard using a variety of supplies suggested under *Materials*. Encourage playfulness. (**60 minutes**)

\*Imagine what might be and create images of the future we want, for example:

-drawing a picture, writing a story, a skit, a commercial, a newspaper headline and story, a song, a poem. *Individuals take breaks as needed.* (**60 minutes**)

**11:20** *Instruct each team* to prepare a brief Appreciative Report from its dream session and identify a spokesperson (**15 minutes to prepare, 5 minutes per team to present**)

- Although each team will have a spokesperson, everyone on the team is included in the presentation. All presentations are made to the entire group.

**12:00** Break for lunch

*Afternoon Session (2 hours)*

**12:45** *Small groups reconvene* to discussion common themes and common threads of the various presentations. **(15 minutes)**

**Design:** How can it be? **(60 minutes)**

**1:00** *Share this quote*, pause for a moment of reflection:  
*It's in the shelter of each other that people live.* [Irish proverb]

- *Continuing* in the same small teams **(45 minutes)**

*\*Facilitator shares:* We have identified strengths, values, and qualities that help us overcome trauma and tragedy. Now we have the opportunity to build on those and begin to shape a desired future in which we live out of those strengths.

-*Discussion instruction:* In the same small teams, imagine you have awakened from a long sleep and it is 2030. Another global crisis has struck and people are once again separated and isolated. But in this world humanity has learned from past experience and is resiliencing, overcoming, and growing. Taking in this new world:

\*What does it look like?

\*What are you seeing in 2030 that is new, different, changed, or better?

\*Describe it.

\*Complete the following: In this ideal world when tragedy strikes

-individuals respond by \_\_\_\_\_

-people who are isolated \_\_\_\_\_

-relationships are \_\_\_\_\_

\*What is it that gives life in such negative circumstances?

\*What does living life to the fullest in the face of challenges and obstacles look like?

\*What does it take to thrive rather than just survive?

-*Draft a statement* that bridges the best of “what is” and “what might be.” These statements are called *provocative propositions*. Report to the large group. **(15 minutes)**

**Destiny:** What will be? (*40 minutes*)

**2:00** *Post the following* for all to see. Allow a few moments for reflection:

*When I visit the past now, it is for wisdom and experience, not for regret or shame. I don't attempt to erase it, only accept it. Whatever my physical circumstances are today, I will deal with them and remain present. If I fall, I will rise up...With gratitude, optimism becomes sustainable.* [Michael J. Fox, is a Canadian-American retired actor, author, film producer, and activist for Parkinson's Disease and other causes]

- *Individually, take the provocative propositions* from the last exercise and create a list of inspired action-oriented tasks for yourself using the following examples:

- \*What are the personal commitments you must make in order to make your dream future a reality?
- \*What support will you need along the way?
- \*How do you imagine being able to help others?
- \*Report out to the large group.

**2:40** *Gather* large group in proximity to the altar

-*Invite participants* to place their index cards from the Morning Session on the altar if they so choose.

- *Facilitators congratulate* the group on their good work. Give thanks for what was accomplished and the openness and vulnerability required.

-*Offer everyone* an unlit candle and as candles are lighted, the Facilitator says to the group, "We began by handing our losses over to God so that God's light might redeem them. Now we carry God's light into the world to shine that light for others. We are each the light of God."

-*Invite participants* to share a word or image of what the day has meant to them.

**Closing Prayer**

*Gracious God, we are your people, the work of your hands. So precious are we in your sight that you sent your Son, Jesus. Jesus calls us to heal the broken-hearted, to dry the tears of those who mourn, to give hope to those who despair, and to rejoice in your steadfast love. We realize our call to serve. Help us to know how. Call forth from among us healers, teachers, listeners, mentors, prophets, and evangelists. With our hearts you continue to love your people. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.*

[adapted from United States Catholic Conference of Bishops]

## FROM SHARED TRAUMA TO IMAGINING THE FUTURE by Mary Thomas Watts

**PURPOSE:** To empower people who have lived through shared trauma (in this case, the pandemic and confinement) to create a more ideal future through storytelling and appreciating those things that give life.

**TIME:** Three one-hour sessions. On paper, each session is 55 minutes, to allow some flexibility. For instance, faith communities might insert opening and closing prayers, and other groups and organizations might have their own opening and closing practices. The design might be adapted/expanded for a one- or two-day retreat. You are encouraged to modify it to meet your needs.

**PARTICIPANTS:** These sessions are designed for secular and religious groups.

**GROUP SIZE:** Participants gather and close in plenary and have conversations in table groups or virtual platform breakout rooms of an optimal 6-8 people. If table groups are larger, allow more time for discussion.

**LEADERSHIP:** —A convener heads the leadership team, which includes a designated facilitator for each table or virtual platform breakout group. Ideally, the convener and facilitators should have some experience leading small groups. An orientation/training prior to Session 1 is recommended to familiarize the facilitators with the purpose, process, group norms, and what to do should problems arise.

**MATERIALS:** Whiteboard/markers or shared screen if virtual; Index cards, pens/pencils

**SUGGESTED GROUP NORMS:** A list of suggested group norms is included in this packet, below. The norms should be read before the first breakout conversation at each session, particularly if new people are in attendance, or before the first breakout conversation at a retreat.

## SUGGESTED SMALL GROUP NORMS

- The facilitator’s role is to guide the conversation, not to be the answer person.
- Honor confidentiality of content. This means that you may share whatever you like about the process, but not the content of other people’s personal stories.
- Participate to the extent you choose, respectfully sharing “airtime” with the other members of the group. (Consider using “mutual invitation” to facilitate shared leadership. One person speaks, then invites the next person, who may speak or pass their turn by inviting another.)
- Use “I” statements in lieu of “you,” “everybody knows,” sweeping generalizations, and global declarations.
- Everyone’s thoughts and feelings are valid.
- Gatekeeping, making sure everyone has a chance to speak if they choose, is everyone’s responsibility.
- Only one person speaks at a time.
- Silence is useful and doesn’t need to be filled. In fact, a moment of silence following a question allows people to gather their thoughts for response.
- Practice self-care, meaning that each person is responsible for his or her needs:
  - Speak up if something is not going well for you.
  - Ask for clarification, if you feel lost or don’t understand something.

## OTHER SUGGESTIONS:

## SESSION 1—FROM SHARED TRAUMA TO IMAGINING THE FUTURE

**PURPOSE:** To empower people who have lived through shared trauma (in this case, the pandemic and confinement) to create a more ideal future through storytelling and appreciating those things that give life.

**GROUP SIZE:** Table (or virtual platform breakout) groups of 6-8 are optimal. For larger groups, allow more time for discussion.

**LEADERSHIP:** A convener heads the leadership team, which includes a designated facilitator for each table or virtual platform breakout group. Ideally, the convener and facilitators should have some experience leading small groups.

**10 minutes** *IN PLENARY, GETTING STARTED:* The convener welcomes the participants; shares the purpose statement, schedule for the session, group norms, and housekeeping (snacks, restrooms, etc.), and will be available to keep time and troubleshoot. **Divide into table groups.**

**35 minutes** *TABLE GROUPS*

-*The small group facilitators invite* participants to briefly introduce themselves, by stating their name and a one-word description of what “COVID-19 time” has been for them. **(5 minutes)**

- *Facilitators share* a photo, cartoon, a short news clip, or quote (selected and provided by the convener) related to the pandemic. **(15 minutes)**

Ask participants: \*1. Where are you in this (photo, cartoon, text)?

\*2. How would you expand or modify this, based on your experience during the pandemic?

- *Small groups discuss:* **(15 minutes)**

\*1 What was your greatest loss during the pandemic?

\*2 What would be a fitting way to memorialize that loss?

**10 minutes** *REGATHER IN PLENARY.* Discussion led by convener:

\*What is your main takeaway from the conversation in your small group?

\*How did the conversation in your small group affirm and/or challenge your own experience and attitudes related to the pandemic?

**Session 1 suggested closing prayer for Christian groups:** Creator God, empower us to move forward together, from this time of shared trauma and anxiety, in assembling the positive pieces of our stories to create a fresh vision of an ideal future. As the sun still rises on the darkest day, help us to appreciate, more than ever, all in your Creation that brings new life in this moment and each moment to come. We ask through Jesus, the Son who is Risen for us; the Holy Spirit, our Wisdom Source, who together with you are One God, now and forever. Amen.

*[prayer composed by Christina Brennan Lee]*

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NOTES:

## **SESSION 2—FROM SHARED TRAUMA TO REIMAGINING THE FUTURE**

**PURPOSE:** To empower people who have lived through shared trauma (in this case, the pandemic and confinement) to create a more ideal future through storytelling and appreciating those things that give life.

**GROUP SIZE:** Table (or virtual platform breakout) groups of 6-8 are optimal. For larger groups, allow more time for discussion.

**10 minutes IN PLENARY, GETTING STARTED:** The convener welcomes the participants; shares the purpose and schedule for the session, group norms, and housekeeping details (snacks, restrooms, etc.), and will be available to keep time and troubleshoot. **Divide into table groups.**

**35 minutes TABLE GROUPS**

-*Small group facilitators invite* introductions, if necessary. **(5 minutes)**

-*Share this quote*, pause for a moment of reflection:

*It's in the shelter of each other that people live.* [Irish proverb]

-*Small groups discuss:* **(10 minutes)**

\*1 What and/or who sustained you during the pandemic? Share examples.

\*2 Who relied on you? Share examples.

-*What have you learned* about yourself during the pandemic? **(10 minutes)**

-*What habits, practices, routines, skills, and/or attitudes* that you have acquired during the pandemic and Great Confinement do you want to retain? **(10 minutes)**

**10 minutes REGATHER IN PLENARY, LED BY CONVENER:**

-*How did the conversation* in your group affirm, inspire, or challenge you?

-*What do you want* to do and/or consider more deeply as a result of this session?

**Session 2 suggested closing prayer for Christian groups:** O God of Promise and Hope, we give you thanks for those experiences and people in our lives who give our hearts, minds, and souls shelter and sanctuary. Fill us with the courage and resilience to honor those examples as we, in turn, offer unconditional safe-haven to others. We ask through Jesus, our Savior Christ; the Holy Spirit our Counselor; who together with you are One God, forever and ever. Amen.  
[prayer composed by Christina Brennan Lee]

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NOTES:

## **SESSION 3—FROM SHARED TRAUMA TO IMAGINING THE FUTURE**

**PURPOSE:** To empower people who have lived through shared trauma (in this case, the pandemic and confinement) to create a more ideal future through storytelling and appreciating those things that give life.

**GROUP SIZE:** Table (or virtual platform breakout) groups of 6-8 are optimal. For larger groups, allow more time for discussion.

**10 minutes IN PLENARY, GETTING STARTED:** The convener welcomes the participants; shares the purpose statement, schedule for the session, group norms, and housekeeping (snacks, restrooms, etc.), and will be available to keep time and troubleshoot. **Divide into table groups**

### **35 minutes TABLE GROUPS**

-*Small group facilitator invites introductions, if necessary. (5 minutes)*

-*Share this Michael J. Fox quote: When I visit the past now, it is for wisdom and experience, not for regret or shame. I don't attempt to erase it, only accept it. Whatever my physical circumstances are today, I will deal with them and remain present. If I fall, I will rise up...With gratitude, optimism becomes sustainable.*

-Discussion: \*How will the strengths, values, attitudes, habits, and skills that saw you through the pandemic and Great Confinement inform your life as you move ahead? **(10 minutes)**

\*What else will you need to live the post-pandemic life you envision for yourself? How and/or where might you acquire these additional resources? **(10 minutes)**

-1) Give everyone a pen and index card. 2) Ask participants to write a short sentence, using the following template: *My past is \_\_\_\_\_, my present is \_\_\_\_\_, and my future is \_\_\_\_\_.* 3) Facilitator reads the cards aloud before group comments, then 4) Invite responses: What do you want to say to each other? **(10 minutes)**

### **10 minutes REGATHER IN PLENARY, LED BY CONVENER**

-*What was a peak moment for you in the sessions you have participated in?*

-*What remains for you to explore, decide, or do as a result of these sessions?*

**Session III suggested closing prayer for Christian groups:** O Lord of This Day and All Days to Come, grant us the wisdom and capacity to seek and discover the openness of heart and the mindfulness of gratitude to look beyond our hardships and the pain of our past. Guide us to grow in spiritual strength, values, and positive attitude, honing and developing our skills to rise up whenever we fall now, and in our future. We ask through Christ Jesus, who fell on the way and Rose forever; the Holy Spirit, the Breath of God; who together with you are One God, now, tomorrow, and eternally. Amen. *[prayer composed by Christina Brennan Lee]*

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NOTES:

## **Section 5**

### **Appendix**

#### **Facilitators Resources**

**A: Suggested Group Norms**

**B: Appreciative Inquiry Process Introduction**

**C: Additional Quotations: *optional* - for reflection, handouts, etc.**

**D: Father Tim Schenck: *Hybrid Church***

## **Facilitator Resource A**

### **SUGGESTED SMALL GROUP NORMS**

- The facilitator’s role is to guide the conversation, not to be the answer person.
- Honor confidentiality of content. This means that you may share whatever you like about the process, but not the content of other people’s personal stories.
- Participate to the extent you choose, respectfully sharing “airtime” with the other members of the group. (Consider using “mutual invitation” to facilitate shared leadership. One person speaks, then invites the next person, who may speak or pass their turn by inviting another.)
- Use “I” statements in lieu of “you,” “everybody knows,” sweeping generalizations, and global declarations.
- Everyone’s thoughts and feelings are valid.
- Gatekeeping, making sure everyone has a chance to speak if they choose, is everyone’s responsibility.
- Only one person speaks at a time.
- Silence is useful and doesn’t need to be filled. In fact, a moment of silence following a question allows people to gather their thoughts for response.
- Practice self-care, meaning that each person is responsible for his or her needs:
  - Speak up if something is not going well for you.
  - Ask for clarification, if you feel lost or don’t understand something.

### **OTHER SUGGESTIONS:**

## Facilitator Resource B

APPLYING APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY [AI] IN THE POST-PANDEMIC “NEW NORMAL”  
[adapted from Dr. Ron Fry, <https://weatherhead.case.edu/executive-education/instructors/ronald-fry> ]

*\*Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it. ~Helen Keller*

*\*Victor Frankel said, ...freedom is the choice you have between stimulus and response.*

-AI [Appreciative Inquiry] calls us to discover what is life giving even in the midst of the tragic.

-There will be no back to normal in which things go back to the way they were.

-What becomes normal will be emergent, uncertain, diverse, and not controllable.

\*The implications for the new normal will be that control is an illusion; causality is complex, not linear or predictable; there will be no such thing as objectivity; unintended consequences will be normal and inevitable, so will mistakes.

\*We must remember nothing ever works the same way twice so “best practice” is an illusion.

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The world has suffered great trauma at macro and micro levels. We must decide if we want to live with PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] or move to PTG (post-traumatic growth). [Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004]

We have the power to frame our responses:

|             |    |              |
|-------------|----|--------------|
| <u>PTSD</u> | or | <u>PTG</u>   |
| suffering   |    | resiliencing |
| coping      |    | overcoming   |
| hurting     |    | growing      |

PTG is a natural way to help a community through trauma:

\*Frame a courageous topic (a journey of healing)

\*Share stories of resilience, overcoming, supporting, collaborating, love and caring, all in difficult, traumatic, tragic times

\*Look and listen for strengths and success factors in the stories to imagine together an ideal future state – what gives life in the most challenging circumstances?

\*Co-design ACTIONS to move toward the shared future image

## Facilitator Resource C

### **Optional: Additional Quotations for Facilitator/Group Reflection, Handouts, etc.**

*The world we have made as a result of the level of thinking we have done thus far creates problems we cannot solve at the same level of thinking at which we created them.* — attributed to Albert Einstein

*...[I]t is through language that we create the world, because it's nothing until we describe it. And when we describe it, we create distinctions that govern our actions. To put it another way, we do not describe the world we see, but we see the world we describe.*

— Joseph Jaworski in “Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership, 1998” [emphasis added]

*The greatest and most important problems of life are all in a certain sense insoluble.... They can never be solved, but only outgrown...This ‘outgrowing’, as I formerly called it, on further experience was seen to consist in a new level of consciousness. Some higher or wider interest arose on the person’s horizon, and through this widening of view, the insoluble problem lost its urgency. It was not solved logically in its own terms but faded out when confronted with a new and stronger life-tendency.*

— Carl Jung in “Commentary to the Secret of the Golden Flower” [emphasis added]

*Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection will come even more effective action.* — Peter Drucker, Management Consultant, Author

## **Facilitator Resource D** *used with permission*

### **Hybrid Church - A Way Forward for Church Leaders** **Some background thoughts that may be useful** by Tim Schenck

One of the unfortunate realities of pandemic ministry is that church leaders have, by necessity, spent too much time scrambling and not enough time reflecting. That certainly describes my own experience as a parish priest who literally had to turn a brick and mortar institution into a virtual one overnight.

I know I'm not alone, as clergy and lay leaders everywhere have faced similar circumstances and challenges, all while attempting to plan into a void of uncertainty amid existential exhaustion. It's no wonder reflecting on the future of the church during this time of ministry triage hasn't risen to the top of anyone's to-do list. We've all just been trying to make it through the day.

After a full year of pandemic ministry, I finally took a bit of time to drink some coffee and think about the post-pandemic church in a more strategic way. This time of breaking open our traditional assumptions and radically altering "the way we've always done things" has offered us an opportunity to boldly embrace new models of ministry.

If we approach this with a mindset of resurrection, some deeply-held ministries and traditions will, by definition, die as we seek new and vibrant life as followers of Jesus Christ. Naming them, grieving for them, and then moving on will allow us to thrive in new ways.

I recognize that every parish context is different and that not everything I share in Hybrid Church will resonate. There remain deep truths that have yet to emerge from this time of maintaining community while staying apart. Yet if we don't have a framework for working through the challenges and opportunities in front of us, the needed transformation will not take place. And that has profound ramifications for the future of both our individual parishes and the church broadly defined.

I invite your parish leadership to sit with [this document](#) and reflect deeply upon your post-pandemic ministry. You may use it as a basis for a Vestry retreat or take up the reflection questions month by month over the coming year.

None of us can predict the future. Yet through fervent prayer and decisive action, we may well end up where the Spirit is calling us as a reimagined community of faith.

### [Hybrid Church - A Way Forward for Church Leaders](#)

**The Rev. Tim Schenck** is rector of the [Episcopal Parish of St. John the Evangelist](#) in Hingham, MA. Creator of the wildly popular online devotion [Lent Madness](#), Tim is the author of five books full of faith and humor including, most recently, [Holy Grounds: The Surprising Connection between Coffee and Faith – From Dancing Goats to Satan's Drink](#) (Fortress Press). When not tending to his parish, drinking single-origin coffee, desperately seeking material for his syndicated "In Good Faith" column, or blogging at [Clergy Confidential](#), he's likely hanging out with his family that includes his wife Bryna, two sons Benedict and Zachary, and their dogs Delilah and Cooper. Follow him on Twitter [@FatherTim](#).