

## **NAMING THE PRESENT—ACTIVITY**

Listening groups, much like Naming Losses, Fears and Hopes, involve a process by which congregational members and regular visitors are provided an opportunity to share their experiences and perspectives on the life of the congregation. It is often considered to be a way to “document the diversity of perspective” that reflects congregants’ observations of their individual and communal experience as a congregation. Some real benefits are these: everyone has a voice, and together we hear a range of voices. Rather than debate each other, we practice the art of listening so as to hear each other.

### **Time needed for activity**

75 minutes

### **Group size**

groups of four to twelve members or regular visitors

### **Steps for Activity**

1. Invite people to sign-up. The groups may be self-selected and there is little or no need to adjust who participates in a particular group.
2. Recruit and assign a facilitator and a recorder to each group.
3. The format of the conversations consists of a structured conversation in which individuals are asked to respond to three questions:
  - a. Where do you see signs of God’s presence in or through this church?
  - b. What concerns you about this church? What losses do you grieve or lament?
  - c. What do you hope for the future of this church or its legacy?
4. The facilitator goes around the circle once for each question before moving on to the next question. Participants may “pass” or offer “come back to me later.” Responses are recorded on large paper.
5. After everyone has shared, ask each person to respond to one last question:
  - a. “having listened to everyone else in your group share, what do you think God wants us to keep in mind as we discern what to do next?”
6. When all of the sessions are completed the responses are clustered and summarized into a new document.
7. Following the small group sessions, the Crossroads team should write a report of responses to be shared with the congregation. For best results, commit to keep individual responses anonymous, scrubbing comments of identifying details.

### **Small Group Facilitator Tips**

1. Begin each group with:
  - a. a prayer
  - b. an explanation of the process, noting the importance of holding together both truth and grace. One without the other will not help the process much.
  - c. a warning that you will function as the conversation cop, and may interrupt someone as a way to help us steward our time together well.
  - d. a clarification, "these circles are intended to help with three things:
    - help the Crossroads Team hear from the congregation,
    - help congregation hear from each other,
    - through listening well to each other, help us all hear from God.
2. For particularly long-winded responses, a facilitator or recorder might ask, "could you summarize that in just one sentence"
3. Facilitators can conclude by thanking people for their time and discernment and noting that participation in a group like this is a profession of faith--a way to point to our love for the church and our hope in what Christ is doing in her.

### **Facilitator's Questions**

After the activity, allow time for discussion around some questions like these:

1. How would you describe the overall tone of these groups?
2. In what ways have you given weight to both the sense of gratitude for the past and the need for honesty about the present?
3. Did anything come up that may require further processing or exploration? Explain.