



Episcopal Diocese of Washington

Tending Our Soil: A Thriving Congregations Initiative

About Tending Our Soil

The *Tending Our Soil* thriving congregations initiative seeks to cultivate the changed soil of our diocese so that God's love might grow in our time and place. We will welcome up to 12 congregations into three-year peer learning cohorts for a journey of learning and practicing Christian community for the sake of the gospel. Additional cohorts will be added in 2022 and 2023.

Accompanied by trained coaches, congregational leaders will be guided by five key practices of listening, reconnecting, discerning, cultivating, and celebrating as they build capacities for adaptive leadership through action and reflection for lasting impact. Congregations will clarify mission and vision, plan a ministry initiative and equip their leaders, and launch and assess their initiatives.

Leaders, lay and ordained, will cultivate relationships marked by vulnerability, honesty, accountability, and partnership as they build skills and capacities to adapt to changing contexts. Congregations will learn together about themselves, their neighborhoods, and God's will for them in this time and place as they experiment with innovative ways to fulfill a shared mission to "engage in a changing world with an enduring faith in Jesus Christ so that more people may know God's love."

Together, we will strengthen the culture of learning, creativity, and partnership in the Diocese and be transformed to thrive for years to come.

Journey to Launch





Five Key Practices in the Tending Our Soil Process

These steps build on one another and are designed to repeat in various forms to become habits that shape ongoing congregational life.

Five Key Practices

Activities May Include



Listen

The foundation of the process is listening to God, ourselves, and the world around us. Listening will help us (re)discover our neighborhoods, learn about the place and people to whom God has called us and notice what God is up to among us and in our neighborhoods. Drawing on Ignatian practices of the Examen, leaders will look honestly at parish health and ministries and their context and share experiences of fruitfulness and struggle.

- Parish vital signs assessment
- Dwelling in the Word
- Listen to the church community
- Listen to neighbors (MissionInsite)
- Clarify mission and vision



Reconnect

As we listen to God, ourselves, and others, we will dig deep to reconnect with God's dream for our community and the world. In this process of reconnecting we will explore Episcopal tradition, core theological beliefs, and polity. We will identify gaps between our lived reality and God's dream and confess before a loving God who meets us in our failure. Confessing the reality of the world and complicity in broken structures, will free us to hear God's purposes afresh.

- Tell our story + God's story
- See the world through God's eyes
- Reclaim core practices
- Identify opportunities
- Liturgy of confession



Discern

Again, drawing on Ignatian spirituality, we will listen faithfully for where the Holy Spirit is leading us to new action, naming the gifts, Christian practices, and opportunities unique to our parishes and dreaming wildly about fresh possibilities to claim God's abundance. The discernment process will be rooted in the intersection of the stories of God, stories of us, and the stories of our neighbors.

- Practice discernment
- Identify project focus
- Neighborhood engagement
- Identify goals, strategies, ministry priorities
- Liturgy of commitment



Cultivate

We will cultivate the soil of our communities, saying yes to God's call by clarifying our mission and vision, adopting a path of discipleship, planning and launching or redesigning a ministry in daring ways, and equipping our leaders to engage that ministry with measurable goals and a demonstrated investment of time, talent, and treasure.

- Implement a path of discipleship
- Engage design thinking
- Equip & commission leaders
- Engage neighbors
- Experiment, with feedback loops



Celebrate

We will witness and share the movement of the Holy Spirit in our midst, and at key intervals celebrate failure and success as we grow capacities to learn and live God's mission. Key learnings will be shared throughout the Diocese of Washington and the Episcopal Church.

- Witness to God's mission
- Give thanks to God
- Share new stories of God and Us.



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What Will We Receive and What Is Our Commitment?

Provisions for the Journey

What you'll receive:

- **Coaches** - Congregations will meet regularly with a trained coach who will support them through the process and who will seek resources for the journey .
- **Partners** - Congregations will be grouped into cohorts based on meaningful affinities for mutual support and learning.
- **Opportunities to learn and practice** - Cohorts will develop a learning journey guided by vital signs and five key practices with the help of their coach and the Project Director. The journey will include courses, toolkits, and other offerings through the School for Christian Faith and Leadership as well as ministry experiments with opportunities for reflection and refinement.

Is Your Congregation Prepared for the Journey?

What you'll need:

- **Team** A clergy person and 4-6 vestry-approved lay leaders willing to engage in the process of learning and practicing over 3-years.
- **Readiness** Aware that existing models of ministry need revisioning and strengthening and open to exploring new models of ministry.
- **Health** Sufficient financial stability and congregational trust to engage wholeheartedly in the process.
- **Eagerness To Learn** Ability to ask deep questions about their leadership and their congregation, and openness to change.
- **Stability** Leadership can make a three-year commitment.
- **Ability to Participate** Can carve out the time to participate fully.
- **Fees** \$300/year per congregation as a sign of commitment.

Every Journey Takes Time

The time you'll invest:

- **Coaching** Congregational teams meet with their coach by Zoom or in person for 90 minutes 9 times a year.
- **Learning** Congregational cohorts design learning plans, drawing on the five key practices with a commitment to engage in learning opportunities through the School for Christian Faith and Leadership.
- **Practicing** Leaders practice what they learn with their congregations, implementing a path of discipleship, reclaiming Christian practices, and taking innovative action to be a blessing to, and blessed by, our neighbors.
- **Learning Summits:** Along the way, congregational cohorts gather to learn, tell stories of their journey and celebrate, giving thanks to God.