

Session: Missional Imagination

Description

Community, in the Benedictine context is about creating a sense of the common good in order to safeguard love. Twelfth century monk, and spiritual writer Aelred of Rievaulx said, “love is an attachment of the rational soul”.ⁱ

The idea of a rational soul comes originally from Aristotle who talked about the soul being independent of the body and the “characteristic animating principle of human life”. Human love exists outside the bounds of the physical body. For me, this speaks to those connections we feel at times with another person that defy earthly logic.

Christians believe that God is love and that we are all made in God’s image. This means that we are all made to love. But how often do we think about what this means not just for our family but for our community? You cannot build the capacity to love in isolation.ⁱⁱ

Thinking about this makes me appreciate the little community we built when our children were growing up. There were six families and we all lived within in a block of one another. This “community” didn’t happen by osmosis. The lots in our neighborhood were each 1.5 acres each so it wasn’t as if the kids were all out playing in the street and we met there. We sought each other out. I heard kids playing behind my house and I walked up to introduce myself to Sherry. We started a weekly play group. Another neighbor, Kate, saw me at preschool and found out that we lived a block away and she joined us. Kate saw Anne and her daughter at the library and invited them to playgroup. Sherry introduced us to Sally (across the street) and Anne introduced us to Lisa (the lot behind her house). There were 14 kids in all.

It wasn’t always easy. Our lives were busy, and we came from different faith traditions. Some of us worked outside the home and others didn’t. But we committed to living life in community together. We established traditions like decorating gingerbread houses at Christmas, snow-day rituals and pumpkin carving for Halloween. A different mom hosted each time. A group of us attended Christmas Eve services together every year and then we had a big Christmas eve supper. We had our weekly playgroup. We carpooled, coordinated sports together and would even make orthodontist runs with one mom swinging around the neighborhood to pick up any kids who needed their braces tightened.

Here’s the thing. My children learned things from each of those parents that they most likely would never have learned from us. They knew they were loved by other people besides us. This also gave them other adults that they could talk to during different stages of life. The kids are all grown now and on their own but we’re still a big crazy family, gathering every chance we get. We love each other.

I may not have realized it at the time, but we were creating “a sense of the common good in order to safeguard love”.

In this session you will dream about creating a sense of community (and mission) outside your immediate family. Each member of your family will dream a bit and then the others will have the opportunity to offer ideas and encourage those dreams.

Materials Needed

One piece of paper and pen or pencil for each member of the family and a timer.

Handouts

None

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Read aloud the quote or scripture

“Did I offer peace today? Did I bring a smile to someone’s face? Did I say words of healing? Did I let go of my anger and resentment? Did I forgive? Did I love? These are the real questions. I must trust that the little bit of love that I sow now will bear many fruits, here in this world and the life to come.” *Henry Nouwen*

Questions for discussion (10 minutes)

1. Do you feel like you have a “community” outside your immediate family? Explain.
2. If someone didn’t have a community outside their immediate family, what might that look like? How would they start that?
3. How do you think God feels about community? How do you think God would define community? Explain.
4. Should there be rules about who can be part of your community and who can’t? Would God want you to have rules about that? Why/Why not? Explain.
5. What are some of the things we might learn when we are in community with people outside of our immediate family? What about outside our faith tradition? Is that good or bad? Explain.

Rule of life activity

Missional Imagination

1. Give each member of the family a piece of paper and a pen. For littles you can put them with a buddy.
2. Set the timer for 10 minutes.
3. Each person spends ten minutes writing down their wildest missional dream that they might not have even told anyone before.

4. It could be something that creates a sense of community and love, or it could be something completely different. What could you do that would make the world a better, more loving place?
5. After 10 minutes everyone silently passes their paper to the right.
6. You now have 5 minutes to silently read what the person to your left wrote and write some ideas, comments and encouragement to that person. No negative comments please.
7. After 5 minutes silently pass it again to the right and do the same for the next person.
8. Once each person's paper makes it all the way around the circle and comes back to them, each person reads their missional imagination idea and the comments out loud for the group.
9. Lastly, discuss whether you'd like to make one (or all) of your missional imagination ideas happen. If so, make an action plan and put it on the calendar.

Examen

How did it go? Debrief highs and lows

1. Each person shares their favorite part of the conversation / activity and why.
2. Each person shares their least favorite part and why.
3. Did you do a Serving/Giving activity last week? How did it go?

Serving /giving ideas for any time this week: Choose one or create your own. These can be done individually or as a group. You will be sharing your serving experience in the next session.

- Volunteer to serve food at a local homeless shelter.
- Pick or purchase flowers and put them secretly on your neighbor's porch.
- Purchase some new baby clothes and donate them to a women's shelter.
- Host a neighborhood ice cream social. Make invitations and invite the neighbors.
- Find an elderly person or single mom who uses firewood. Chop and deliver some for them.

ⁱ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2008), 510.

ⁱⁱ Ibid., 234.