

Leading with Vitality Council Reflection: Continuous Evaluation

How to use the Leading with Vitality Council Reflection: Share this document with the Council members prior to the Council meeting and add 15 minutes to the beginning of the agenda for shared reflection. Prior to the meeting, invite one member of the Council to lead the discussion. Here's a simple outline for how the shared reflection might go.

First, the reflection leader reads the scripture passage aloud. Second, the reflection leader highlights one idea from the reflection that the reflection leader found meaningful or challenging. Third, the reflection leader uses one or more of the reflection questions below to encourage discussion. When the discussion draws to a close, the reflection leader closes the time with the prayer using the prayer below or another prayer they create.

Scripture Reading

Revelation 21:1-5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

‘See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.’

And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’

Continuous Evaluation

“How’s it going?”

How would you answer that question? It depends, right? It depends on who is asking, and why they are asking.

“How’s it going?” Most of the time, when someone asks me that, I say, “Fine! How’s it going with you?” And they say, “Fine.” In that situation, it’s a ritual exchange, it’s a greeting.

But let’s say a good friend asks me that question, someone who knows me well, someone who knows my current joys and struggles. “How’s it going?” I might respond by giving her an “organ recital”: “Well, my shoulder’s feeling better, but the eye doctor wants me to do another test...”

For Renew 145, we want to ask ourselves on a regular basis, “How’s it going?” Instead of answering “Fine!” or replying with an “organ recital,” we ask “How’s it Going?” in order to see where we are with our commitments and process.

Here's a very simple, but effective way to evaluate your efforts. This is called a "plus, minus, next" reflection.

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Image credit: Ness Labs <https://nesslabs.com/plus-minus-next>

Here's how the process could work. Identify a ministry project like interviewing community members to get a better sense of the hopes and needs of your neighborhood. Here's how you could use this process to evaluate your progress with the project.

How's it Going?

Write down the pluses. What's gone well with this effort? What can you work with? What resources are available to you now?

Maybe you've identified some folks you'd like to talk with. Maybe you've talked together about who is in contact with whom: is somebody in your congregation connected with the school system? What errands are people regularly doing in your congregation? Where are connections possible?

I've been careful in limiting my face-to-face contact during COVID, but over the past year I have gone out into my community: I go regularly to a local farm stand. I go to grocery stores. I've gone to the post office. I see neighbors out walking their dogs. The other day I went to a shoe store. I saw my dentist. I saw my doctor. I have a friend who manages a local business and we go on walks outdoors together sometimes. Even with really limiting my in-person contacts, I have still had opportunities to talk with all kinds of people in my community this past year. That's a plus!

What successes and opportunities might you add to your list?

How's it Going?

Next, **write down the minuses.** Where are the struggles or the bottlenecks?

Maybe you all feel weird talking with people about how your church can be of help. It's one thing to go to the shoe store, but it's another thing to open up conversation about community issues when mostly you go there to buy shoes. So maybe you write down as a minus: We don't feel comfortable talking about these things — we just don't know what to say!

And here's where we change the question from 'How's it Going?' to 'What's Next?'

Looking at our pluses and minuses, what's our next step? What could we do next?

Write down some ideas on where to go next.

If the plus is that we already go on errands and have opportunities to talk with people, but the minus is, that right now we feel awkward opening up a conversation, what if we practiced a conversation together? What if we thought of some questions together? What if we did some role playing together, so it feels more comfortable to have the conversation. All of those questions could go under ‘What’s Next’ because they are realistic next steps for us to help us ask people in the community for their thoughts.

Plus, minus, next.

We evaluate what’s going well. We evaluate where we feel challenged. We come up with a “next step” to move us forward.

“Plus, minus, next” reflections can be used on an individual basis, or with a group. It’s a very simple, but powerful way to see where you’re at and how you can move forward. It’s also very effective when used on a regular basis.

Resources:

For more about Plus, Minus, Next journaling, and some examples, check out this article here: <https://nesslabs.com/plus-minus-next>

This article is oriented to individuals, but Plus, Minus, Next reflections can easily be adapted for regular meetings with groups.

Reflection by Pastor Anna Havron.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Do you already have ways you regularly evaluate things within your congregation?
2. Where might you try a plus, minus, next process in your ministry?
3. How might an evaluation process bring about positive and productive outcomes that energize the ministry?

Prayer:

Creator of the Universe, at the beginning of time you called creation into being. Across the ages, that creation has grown, evolved and changed. Through the life and love of Jesus, you made all things new. Give us the wisdom to evaluate, the strength to change, and the courage to act as we respond to your love and follow Jesus’ teachings. Amen.